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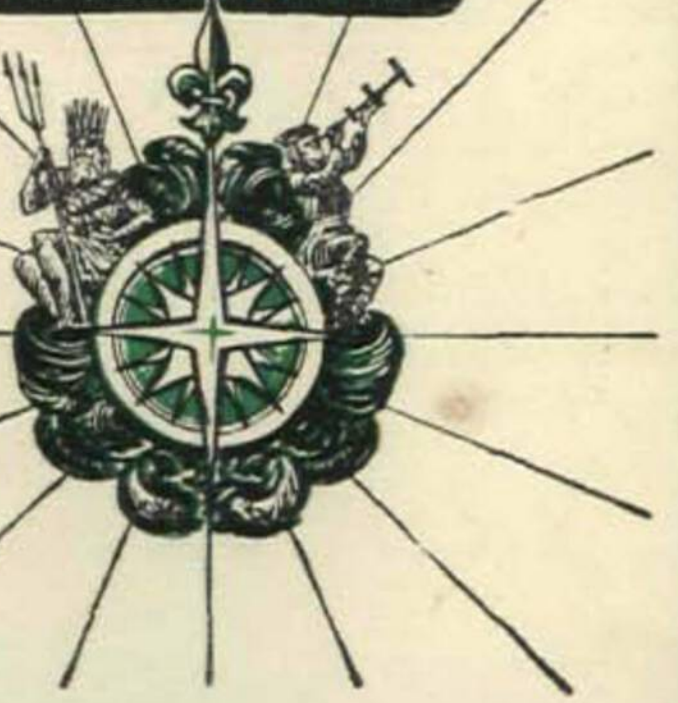

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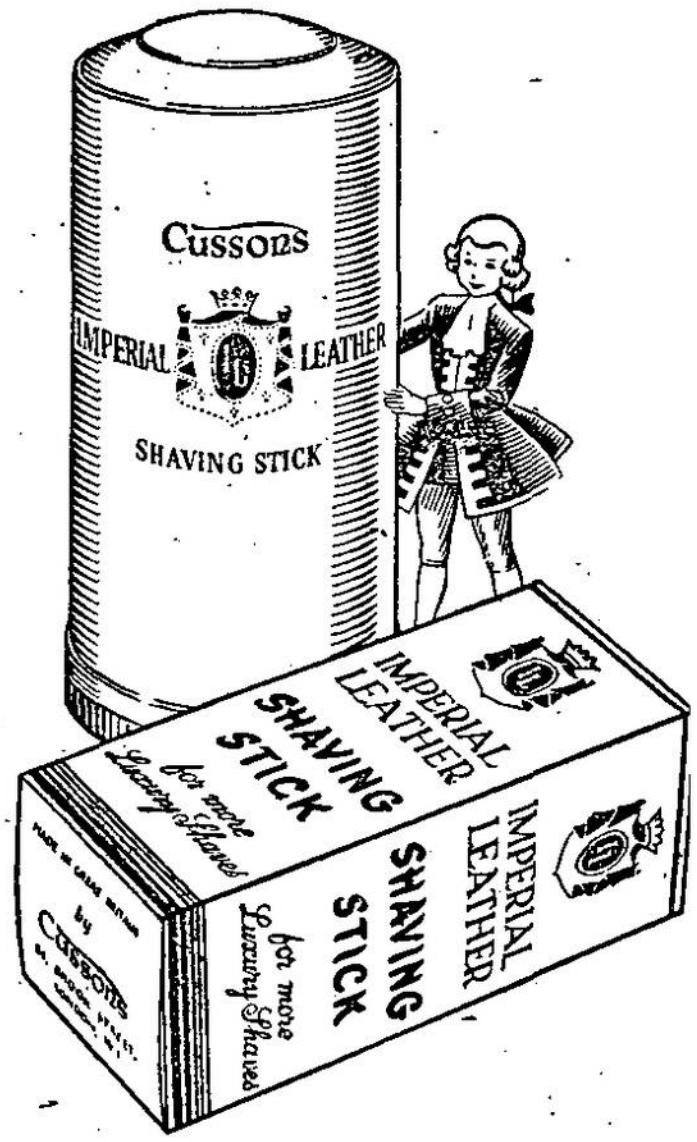

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ARGOSY

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Dr. Browning at Breakfast

" Will ye take a scrambled egg, Dr. Browning, with your toast,
Or p'raps the daintiest slice of ham or beef,
Or a snack of Finnan haddie (and ye'll pardon me the boast)
O' dainties they Scots haddies are the chief;
There's porritch on the wagon, Dr. Browning, if ye wish,
And devilled kidneys comin' from below
And if ye'd wet your whistle—o' coky take a dish—"
" Cocoa! Mrs. Green, Cocoa! "

" Anchovies are beside ye and honey from the hive,
And creases if ye'd like a bit o' green;
Or just look'ee at that lobster—in the pot at half past five;
Or if it takes your fancy a sardine.
If furrin is your taste there's some Rooshan caviare
Or them apricocks that Green himself did grow
La, and if ye'd wet your whistle there's coky, and to spare—"
" Cocoa!! Mrs. Green, Cocoa!! "

" Have a mushroom or a muffin, all aswimming in its grease
Or a slice of brawn, a relishin' o' mace;
Just make yeself at 'ome, Dr. Browning, if ye please,
I would like to see ye plumper in the face.
Grilled trout and seedy cake, peach preserve and prawns in pot,
Fried sassage, bacon, ox tongue, and cod's roe;
Why, and if ye'd wet your whistle there's Koky pipin' hot—"
" Cocoa!!! Mrs. Green, Cocoa!!! "

WALTER DE LA MARE

ROMAN FIGURES

BY H. E. BATES

HE was last coming off the shift at noon. The six of them, including himself and Johnson, had been working some way up the gully of the new quarry face, where the rock was raw cheese-yellow under the rim of dry brown earth. Big batches of wild golden broom had sown themselves across the old workings and sometimes as he looked up in the heat of June the entire valley seemed alive with running flame.

He stooped behind a tip-truck to tie his bootlace. It was his ruse for dropping back. His rock-dusty fingers were thick and awkward and by the time he had finished tightening both laces he saw that Johnson and the rest were already at the foot of the line.

The thin silver rails of the narrow-gauge track quivered with heat where they met in the dusty distance. The crusher that had cracked and thundered and spewed white rock-dust all morning was quiet in the cloudless noon.

He turned and walked back up the track. He was so sick of Johnson, so obsessed by it, that he had come away from the quarry face with a spanner in his hands and even when stooping to tie his bootlaces, had put it down and picked it up again and had not noticed it.

Now he became aware of it and stopped to stare at it stupidly, a big blue steel ratchet-spanner that he used on the mechanical digger and that he had blindly grabbed and walked away with when the whistle blew.

"How's the villa, Joe boy? Found the villa yet, Joe? How big's the villa going to be when you find it, Joe? Big enough for you and Kitty? Think the professor'll give you first chance on it?"

At first he simply said, "Put a sock in it, Johnson," but now he had gone beyond that.

"Only asking, ain't I? After all, you gotta find the villa. You got the bath-house. You gotta find the villa."

"They'll find it. Without your help."

"Hope so too. You don't catch me excavating for Roman prefabs. How'd they know it's Roman, anyway?"

"Shut your mouth, Johnson. One of these days you might open it and say something."

It was six weeks since he had first scooped up, on a parching windy April morning, a squared corner-stone of rock and half a scoop of what he thought at first were broken flowerpots.

He got down from the scoop and held a few fragments of terra-cotta in his hands and let a little of the light red-brown dust run through his fingers.

He found a larger piece of terra-cotta that might have been the rim of a shallow bowl and for some time he stood there looking at that too with brown, puzzled, unvindictive eyes until at last Pop Nichols came up and saw it and said: "You better tell Mr. Dyson. I remember Jim Pawley found some stuff like that up on the old workings. There was a hell of a row because he dumped it and never said. You go down to th' office and tell Mr. Dyson. I think it's Roman or something, Joe."

That was the beginning of the bath. Mr. Dyson rang up the curator of the archaeological museum in the county town, a man named Brookes, who presently came out on Saturdays and Sundays and began digging when the men were not working on the Monday. The men called Brookes the professor, and after the first weekend the men on the new quarry face went up to look at the excavations.

An oblong trench had been dug and except that there were steps in it Joe Longland thought it looked like a grave. A little pile of the familiar terra-cotta fragments lay beside it and farther away a heap of small squared stones. He picked up one of these stones in his big hands and held it and looked at it for some time. A pale rose dust, like pollen, came off on his fingers and in his slow way he felt stirred for the first time by the idea that he might be holding something immensely old, something ageless and wonderful, in his hands.

"Roman, my bloody foot," Johnson said. "How do they know? Like this talk about the world being a million years old. They wasn't there, was they? How do they know?"

That night Joe Longland talked to Kitty about the dust, the thin light rosy dust, that had come off on his fingers. He and Kitty were saving up to get married; she was a dark, warm-skinned, eager girl who did housework for a doctor in the mornings and work in the fields, hop-lying, strawberry-picking, and so on,

most afternoons. She was pretty and brown with sun. They were saving nearly three pounds a week between them and had been waiting for more than four years for a house to fall empty. Joe was cautious and steady and stubborn, with prejudices about taking rooms with other people. Proudly he wanted a house of his own.

"When was Roman?" he said. "About how long ago?"

That was how they came to be interested. At first they merely walked up in the evenings through the old gully of the quarry workings and then over the bleached grey stubble of last year's wheat crop that still covered the field where Joe was working.

The evenings were calm and warm. The two of them sat on dry stubble and gazed at the professor's excavations. Neither of them understood these excavations. The second weekend he had begun a shallower, wider piece of digging and at the bottom of it, like a floor, lay a pattern of the little square rosy-brown tiles that Joe had found.

Joe was puzzled because even this shallower excavation was three feet or more below the stubble surface. "Did it sink down there? If it didn't, how did that depth of soil get on top of it? You'd think up here, on this hill, it'd be the other way round. You'd think soil would blow away."

"The thing to do is to ask this professor," she said. "Why don't we come up Saturday and ask him?"

On Saturday afternoon they stood quietly, almost shyly, watching a young brown fair-haired man in khaki shorts scrupulously brushing dust from the tiled floor at the bottom of the shallower excavation. He seemed as absorbed in this work, crawling on his hands and knees, as a man trying to pick up minute fallen grains of seed.

"Excuse me," Joe said, "could you tell us if Professor Brookes is coming this weekend?"

The man lifted his head sharply from the trench. His eyes, light blue and quick, seemed to dance in the sun.

"I'm Brookes."

Joe could not believe it. Professors were inevitably old and bearded, with perishable memories. They were short-sighted and peered at the world through microscopes. Their trade mark was the decayed umbrella. Brookes, on the other hand, had the almost curt look of a youthful impostor and a tongue that was cryptic.

"Interested in this?"

"I work here," Joe said. "I'm the one that dug it up."

"Good."

For some time this cryptic, almost boyish manner of speech kept them at a distance, intimidated. They could only watch the scrupulous hands at work with the brush, cleaning the rose-brown tiles, and feel awkwardly a deepening sense of intrusion. For long intervals Brookes too seemed to forget them, becoming absorbed in occasional fresh neat excursions into earth with the shining point of a builder's trowel.

"Shall we go?" Kitty said. More deeply than Joe, she felt the sense of intrusion; the way Brookes ignored them seemed pointed and offhand.

"Oh! don't go."

The voice from the trench was terse and peremptory; she could not believe that it came from the youthful, absorbed figure picking away with the trowel.

"Come down here and have a look at this. This is the heating chamber." He began curtly to explain his discoveries. "You hit the thing in a lucky place. Another yard or two and you might have bust it to pieces."

"Hot water?" Joe said.

"Why not? The villa probably had central heating too."

"How old is all this?"

"First or second century. Probably second. That's a coin I picked up—end of the second century. Of course it doesn't date it. Could have been dropped a century after the place was built."

Joe held the coin in his big hands. After a moment or two Kitty took it from him and looked at it for some time too and then handed it back to the professor.

"No. Keep it. We'll find plenty like that. It's not particularly rare. Keep it."

The blue eyes danced, flashing pure and quick, smiling, so that the girl was slightly embarrassed, taken unawares, not knowing what to say.

"Thank you very much," Joe said. "That's very kind of you."

"Not a bit. You're interested. Local people usually aren't."

"What did you mean about a villa?" Joe said.

"There was probably a house here. Generally the bath-house was some distance away—sort of up the garden path. We may find it. The trouble is to get enough help with the digging."

Joe laughed.

"We're looking for a house," he said. "It might suit us."

"We've been waiting over four years," Kitty said. "I don't think we'll ever get one."

"We've waited all this time," Joe said. "We can wait a bit longer."

When Kitty smiled, her small upper teeth, level and pretty, bit down with shy delicacy on her lower lip. The professor seemed attracted by this quick expression of diffidence and said, smiling back at her: " Well, you could hardly find a better spot than this. The Romans knew how to pick them—halfway up the hillside like this. Perfect. Look at it." He waved rose-dusty hands towards the summer valley, where the course of the little river was traceable only by its fringe of alder trees and the meadows about it were gold-green with swathes of hay.

" Nice to think of it, isn't it? Nearly two thousand years ago—probably a vineyard just below us here. Wild hyacinths in the woods, probably nightingales—changed a lot, of course, in some ways, but in some ways not much."

In the old quarry workings the brown everywhere was pricked with fire and the air was heavily sweet with the first summer hay.

" Probably got their stone from the same quarry," the professor said. " Sure to have done. And we're probably from the same stock—well, not you and I," he said to Joe, " but she might well be—"

" Me? " Suddenly the glow in her skin was dark crimson and the professor watched it flush swiftly up through her face, beyond the black eyebrows, into the roots of the black hair.

" I should think it's more than likely," he said. " That dark hair and that straight nose. And not so very tall."

" A Roman girl," Joe said. " That's a new one—might be your house."

" I wish it was," she said. " I'm sick of waiting." The two men were laughing; she was caught between a cross-fire of words that made her shyer than ever. " All we'll get is a prefab. Or a hut. If we're lucky."

Suddenly Joe saw the pain of her shyness and said: " Did you mean it about not getting any help with the digging? I'll help. I'll come and dig."

" It has to be voluntary," the professor said. " There's no money—"

" That's all right," Joe said. " I'll come. Kitty and me'll come. Any night we can."

" It would have to be while I was here," the professor said. " Under my direction. But I start my summer holiday next week—three weeks of it—and I'm thinking of putting up at the pub here and digging most of the time."

" We'll come," Joe said. " Evenings and Saturdays. Kitty might be able to come some afternoons too—eh, Kitty? "

" I might come when the strawberries are finished," she said. The flush had died slowly from her face and now she was looking

down at the little valley with its hidden stream and its fields with their light gold rings of hay.

"I never thought I'd be digging for a house. That's something I never thought of."

He walked in a confused and heavy way up the gully of the old workings, still swinging the wrench. In the hot sun the many bushes of broom were not only a mass of dripping flame. They clotted the air with a honey-thick fragrance that seemed to flow down through the old hot rocks in a suffocating stream.

It was the second or third weekend when Johnson first began to taunt him. He could not remember which. He was confused now even about the day he had discovered the site, about the day the professor had arrived, and about the afternoon Kitty had first worked with him at the diggings and had come back to say: "He makes it feel you've lived up there. All of a sudden you feel the stones are talking."

"How's the professor?" Johnson began to say. "Grown a beard yet? I thought professors had beards. Found the garden path?"

"Garden path?"

"Well, somebody's got to be led up it, ain't they?" Johnson said.

In the hot weather the fields of strawberries ripened quickly; by the end of June, the first week of the professor's holiday, the short season was over. Kitty, with nothing to do, began to help the professor two or three afternoons a week and then again with Joe in the evenings.

And sometimes Joe, perched high on the mechanical scoop, would be able to swivel round and catch sight of them, two brown absorbed figures, not quite real, kneeling close together in the illusory quivering heat across the stubbled hillside.

To him, all the time, the work seemed painfully slow. Uneasily he began to feel that that was not quite real either, that the idea of a villa, of a Roman household, of people cultivating vines, listening to nightingales, luxuriating in hot baths, was also illusory, a mere part of the professor's charm. He was so used to excavating earth by the ton that he wanted to attack the site with pick and shovel, heartily, powerfully, with a muscular enthusiasm that would bring the whole pattern to life in a day.

The professor remained rigidly and academically scrupulous. He scooped earth away with slow skilled reverence, brushing dust with the fanatical precision of a fond spinster grooming a precious parlour carpet in springtime. This slow precision made it appear sometimes to Joe as if, in the long July afternoons, not

a spadeful of earth had been removed, as if the Roman dust remained exactly as he had left it the evening before.

Then all through the heat of a July afternoon Johnson muttered over and over again that he thought the site was deserted.

" Don't see the professor. Don't see the professor's assistant. Don't see nobody. Must have gone to have a lay-down to cool off somewheres—"

" You mag just like a bloody woman, don't you? " Joe said.

" Well, even professors git hot sometimes, don't they? Even professors've got to lay down sometime."

Joe swung a spanner. He was not aware of swinging it. He saw Johnson duck by the rock face. He saw the flash of a double spark, two winks of flame, as the spanner struck rock above Johnson's head.

Then he saw Johnson dive for the spanner. In four or five big strides he was there before him, pinning Johnson back by the neck against the rock, holding the spanner neck-high with the other hand.

" You goad me just once more and see," he said. He could feel the central bone of Johnson's neck giving, under his hand. The face was a mere hot withered blur of flesh against carved yellow rock.

" You just goad me—"

" Keep your bloody hair on," Johnson said.

" Just goad me," he said. " Just goad me."

That evening, when he left the shift and walked across to the excavations, neither the professor nor Kitty were where he had expected them to be. The site of the bath was deserted. His illusion that neither rock nor dust had been touched became suddenly real.

He stared down for some minutes at the empty grave-like diggings, troubled and sick, remembering Johnson. In a flash he felt his anger against Johnson turn and renew itself and surge against the two people he could not find, and in a moment he was lumbering like a bewildered bear across the hill.

He had not taken more than ten or a dozen strides when he saw the dark head of Kitty jump up forty or fifty yards away, startling, bodiless, straight out of earth.

She saw him at once and waved her hand and began shouting something about the villa.

" Joe! " she shouted. " We think this is it. This is the villa! "

Stupidly, with uneasy and stumbling devotion, he went across to her. " Couldn't think where you'd got to," he said.

" The professor had a plan and we started digging here—"

"No, it was just a hunch," the professor said. "I took a fix on the pub sign. There's probably always been a ford on the river there, so I got the ford and the pub sign and this spot all in one line and hoped. Not very orthodox, but the hunch came off."

"Don't you think that was clever?" she said. Her face, under the black hair, was crimson-brown with dust and sun and excitement. "We've got a house after all."

He smiled at her and then suddenly rubbed his hand across her hair, brushing it.

"You're all dusty," he said and sickly he remembered how near, by the rock face, in frenzy, he had come to killing Johnson.

He had reached the top of the old gully. He had only to walk now across the field. He had chosen the end of the morning shift because he knew that the professor would be alone at the excavations. It would be an hour before Kitty arrived.

"Ask him yourself," Johnson had said. "I never said it. He said it. In the pub—that little Roman girl, he kept calling her."

"That's all right, Johnson. I've heard him call her that."

"Yeah, but not with that look on his face."

"What look?"

"The what's-yours-is-mine look," Johnson said. "You know."

That had been halfway through the morning shift. It was cunning of Johnson, though he did not see it, to give that twist to things. It had been easy when there was only Johnson's face leering against the rock face or bulging in terror as he held the neck savagely pinned. Now Johnson had him tied in knots, with the result that it was not Johnson he hated, but the professor.

As the morning went on and the heat of the day thickened, he found himself lashing and groping through a mass of complicated emotion, trying to struggle free. Now and then, down on the new workings, the shot-firers touched off blastings, two or three in succession, that cracked violently in the hot morning air. There was shot-firing every day and ordinarily he never noticed it. He had been so used to it so long that it was just another form of silence. The sound of nightingales always seemed far louder from the oaks at the top of the gully. It was getting late for nightingales now but in the season, when mating was in full flush, they sang not only at night but throughout most of the day, madly, never afraid of the blasting.

But now, during the sultry heat of the morning, he was shaken and startled by every blast. He was off his guard at the crack of each explosion, so that each time the blood jumped violently

and darkly through his head. All his efforts at thinking were simply a series of grotesque and incoherent pictures—Johnson leering and lying, the professor and Kitty alone together in hot afternoons on the hill, the professor calling her his Roman girl, the professor with his stories of people looking down across that valley two thousand years ago, watching the vines, the sun, the summer grass by the summer river, listening to the nightingales—the professor with his way of making the stones talk. He knew that that was the way a man could get a girl excited and fooled and mesmerized.

Now, as he came lumbering up from the gully into the field of stubble beyond, he was all set to get to the truth of it. Unconsciously, hot and blind, he was swinging the spanner. At the back of his mind was the red-hot thought that he had given Johnson a lesson with the spanner. Just a lesson—just the face terrorized for a moment or two, just the bone of the neck pinned back by the rock. It never entered his head again that he had held Johnson, just for a second or two, like a fat scared fly, at the point of death.

Then, as he reached the excavations, he saw that they were empty. It had been ten days or more since the first excited discovery of the villa's foundations and during that time the professor and himself and Kitty had worked more quickly than before, uncovering the oblongs of two small rooms. Now he wandered into and out of this broken ghost-house almost senselessly, searching clumsily for something he could not find.

It was only when he heard his name called that he came to himself for the first time. It was Kitty's voice, calling him from the edge of the spinney above the diggings, and for a final moment, just before turning in answer, he half expected to see her there with the professor. He half wanted to see her there.

Instead she was sitting alone in the long grass under the edge of the spinney, bare-headed, eating the last of a packet of sandwiches. As he came up to her he could see white crumbs of bread on her lips that she had not wiped away. Seeing them, his frenzy began to ebb out of him even before he heard her say: "I think the professor's gone down for a drink. I thought I caught sight of him—what made you come up? I somehow thought you would."

"I don't know. I just thought—" The spanner was still in his hand.

She saw it and said: "All of a hurry too. What made you all of a hurry?"

He felt the blood rushing into his throat. The terror of almost killing Johnson came swelling back, horrible and conscious. With

sickness he remembered the professor and the way he had come blindly to find him there.

A moment later he was pressing her down against the earth.

"I just wanted you," he said. "I was just thinking about you—" He saw her lips, rose-dark, parted to reveal the soft, wet tongue between.

The flush of excitement was rising quickly in her throat, up through the sun-brown face, beyond the black eyebrows and at last under the thick black hair.

He was speaking and kissing her at the same time: "Don't let's wait," he said. "I don't want to wait no longer. I'm sick of waiting. We don't want to wait no longer, do we?"

"What about the house?"

"We can get rooms," he said. "Pop Nichols has got two rooms. We've waited long enough. I'm sick of waiting—"

She began laughing and put her lips to his face. In the long grass she did not feel that she was breathing. Her bare brown arms pulled him down to her and held him against her body until it was no longer possible to see, above and about him, anything of the pure hot noon sky.

"Do you think I was ever a Roman girl?" she said. She was laughing again, the blood warm and crimson in her throat. "Do you think they were anything like me? Do you think they felt the same?"

He did not answer. Below them the villa with its naked dust lay exposed to the midday sun so that it was without a shadow on the hillside. The broom was flaring on the rock.

In the spinney there was no sound of nightingales and presently there was no sound at all as she held him against her, in the deep grasses, imprisoned, out of the sun.

EXCITING! INTRIGUING!

"THE CHRYSALIDS"

by JOHN WYNDHAM

Brilliant new Science Fiction Novel
by the author of
"The Day of the Triffids"

IN ARGOSY NEXT MONTH

TALKING POINT
by Geoffrey Household

COME on into the bar! There's a good fire in the bar. Well, yes, maybe young Tug Wilson *is* there, but you needn't be afraid. He doesn't talk as much as he used to ever since he won his medal for saving life, and you certainly won't find him talking about that.

Got it for shooting a line? In a way. Yes, he did get it for that in a way. But he deserved it all right. How would you like to spend a night on the face of Shiel Fell, with the Black Tarn waiting for you below and just room for the seat of your pants on a sloping ledge?

I know what you're thinking—that a man who talks as much as Tug hasn't time for any real guts. And when he isn't talking, he's shadow-boxing or imitating Danny Kaye. I don't wonder you're doubtful.

It was an evening last spring, and Tug was taking a short cut across the moor as he had missed the last bus home, all through telling the watchmaker what was wrong with his watch and how to mend it.

He was striding home along the shores of Black Tarn when in the very last of the light he saw, across the water, two chaps on the face of Shiel Fell standing on nothing at all.

You know Shiel Fell.

It's a nice Sunday-afternoon walk if you go up it from the back. And the rock is so safe that if you have the head for it, you can sit on the edge of the cliff with your feet dangling over the Black Tarn four hundred feet below.

But those two young fellows were on a holiday, and they had started to traverse the face of the cliff. Germans or Austrians or suchlike they were—the sort who couldn't see a bit of good and difficult rock without wanting to climb it. Shiel Fell looked easy

"He was never allowed to get to the end without someone interrupting"

to them, I expect, with all those ledges and cracks leading into one another—up to a point.

Tug stopped practising his voice production and ran round the shore of the Tarn to get a better view, for he remembered that young Cambridge man who was stuck on the Fell two years ago and drove his backbone into his chest when he hit the water.

The two were spread on the face as flat as if they had been painted on it. They had the toes of their boots in something quite invisible, and were leaning on the smooth slab above them with their arms spread out.

He could see how they had got there, and what they hoped to find—which was any sort of a handhold. But there wasn't one. He yelled up that he was going to get help and that they were not to move till he got back.

The nearest house was Allister's farm, and that was three miles away up a cart track and without a telephone, of course. What with Tug trying to cut his story short, which he couldn't, and old Allister trying to believe him, which *he* couldn't, it took time to persuade him to set off down the dale for help. And, even so, it might be the small hours of the morning before help arrived.

Round here we don't have much of this climbing, and there aren't any rescue squads all ready with ropes and brandy. I know some places up in Cumberland where the shepherds can't get on with the lambing. Whenever there's an early spring blizzard, they have to turn out and collect these young students off the ends of their ice-axes.

Tug was back at the Black Tarn in a couple of hours. Then he, too, began to traverse the face of Shiel Fell and climbed up in the dark till he was fifty feet below those two foreigners—and that was as far as any man could go unless he wanted to risk being picked for a Mount Everest party. There he settled down, and started in to keep them cheerful until the rescue party arrived.

" Now, you keep awake, boys! " he said to them. " Whatever you feel like, keep awake! "

I can't imagine anyone falling asleep in the position of those two chaps, but I'm told it's possible. And, of course, if either dozed off long enough just to slacken his knees for an instant, he wouldn't know what had happened till his acceleration was fifteen feet a second with another three hundred feet to go.

Tug Wilson found room to stretch one leg on something horizontal, and he crossed the other over it and concentrated on keeping the two climbers awake.

First, he told them all he had ever read in the guide-books

about the Black Tarn and how it was supposed to be bottomless. And then he told them the story of old Allister and the three foxes, which was good for half an hour; and Tug must have enjoyed that, for he was never allowed to get to the end without someone interrupting him. I can't see any point in it myself, except that the three foxes weren't there.

At intervals he asked them if they were wide awake, and one of them—it was always the same one—said, yes, they were, and how long would it be before they were rescued.

"They'll be here before dawn," said Tug. "Just you keep from dozing off and the time will pass before you know it."

So he explained to them how he was recommended for the V.C. in 1942, and what the General said to him and what he said to the General. And then he let them have his story of the world flyweight championship. He never saw it, but he can make a good two pages out of the column and a half he read in the paper. Not having much room to move about, he couldn't give them his usual illustrations.

After that he kept them alive by asking them riddles to make them use their heads a bit; but the man who did the talking couldn't guess the answers, and the other only said no. So he explained the point of each riddle to them, just as he used to do in the bar there when nobody laughed.

It was getting along towards dawn and he was halfway through his imitation of the party of Americans being shown round the Tower of London, when he heard a slither above him and a scream. The chap who had been answering came hurtling past him through the air and hit the Tarn such a wallop that Tug could hear the waves breaking on the foot of the cliff.

After that, all was silent. Tug shouted, but got no reply. He didn't expect any. So he thought he had better stay where he was and concentrate on keeping the other fellow awake. That one was still spread-eagled against the slab, and sobbing.

He wouldn't answer more than yes; but so long as he kept on answering it every time Tug said, "Listen, son!" it was enough. And he was still there at daybreak when a fireman came down a rope from the top of Shiel Fell and got a line round him and hauled him up. And then they hauled up Tug Wilson.

The whole party went round the back to the shore of Black Tarn, and from there they saw the other fellow at the foot of the cliff, sitting safe and shivering on a boulder that he must have missed by inches. He had hit the water feet first and got nothing worse than a scraped nose.

As soon as he saw them, he dived in and swam across to them. Tug Wilson was hopping mad.

" Now, why couldn't you have sung out that you had come to no harm? " he asked him. " And what do you want to go falling like that for, after all the trouble I took with you? "

" But I couldn't help dozing," said the poor German or Austrian or whatever he was.

" Well, your friend didn't," Tug reproached him.

" No," he answered, " but, you see, he does not understand a word of English."

Well, for about a week after that we used to hear the story from Tug twice nightly, but in the end he must have seen the point of it himself.

Of course, you can't expect miracles, and I still wouldn't like to be stuck with him on a desert island; but it's quite possible that we can go into that bar and find he isn't talking.

★ ★ ★

FOR EXTRACTION?

Alf (the dental student) still believed in pure love—whatever that is. The Maternity Sister . . . encouraged Alf to talk in terms of psychic affinities, twin souls, hearts beating in unison, and all the rest of it. Probably it tickled her mummified ego to have his attentions. It was not long before she guided his thoughts around to homes and furniture . . . One lunchtime they arranged to meet at a furniture store to see if there was anything they liked the look of. They descended into the bedroom-suite basement, where the Mat. Sister developed a purposeful gleam which Alf mistook for lovelight.

" Now, isn't that a lovely wardrobe," she cooed, opening the door of a walnut horror as big as a barn.

" Yes, my love," murmured Alf, his blood-adrenalin rising by about fifty per cent.

" You could almost hide in it, there's so much room."

" Yes my love."

" Well, there's no one about, so you nip in quickly, and see what it's like inside."

" Yes, my love," Alf sighed and climbed inside. The Mat. Sister quickly slammed the door and turned the key. " Can you hear me in there? " She thumped on the door. " I've locked you in to emphasize how much you annoy me, young man. Now keep away from my hospital in future or I'll have the police on you."

She drew up her bosom defiantly and stalked off, leaving Alf weeping in the wardrobe.

MATTHEW FINCH, *Dentist in the Chair*

The Rain Dripped Death

By Mignon G. Eberhart

I ARRIVED in Chicago on the Twentieth Century express, early in the morning. Blanchard and a young man who proved to be his secretary met me at the train. We lunched at the Saddle and Sirloin Club where I had a steak of incredible excellence. Late in the afternoon I was arrested in connection with murder.

It was a somewhat disconcerting experience. I am a quiet and conservative banker, elderly enough to be a senior vice-president. Also, it was my first visit to Chicago.

Like most New Yorkers, who seldom venture west of the Hudson, I was extremely curious about our great and rival city. So when Blanchard—Chairman of the Board I had been sent to confer with—told me that the meeting I was to attend had been postponed until the following day, I was delighted.

I settled back in the car while Blanchard's secretary, a thin, dark, elegantly dressed young man, disappeared with my baggage checks, and Blanchard essayed the first of a series of jokes aimed at his guest.

"Your first visit here, isn't it, Wickwyre? Well, don't be disappointed if there's no gang murder. We can't have one every day, you know." He chuckled, his blue eyes laughing in his large pink face, which he was wiping vigorously.

It was a hot day in late August—hot but dark and rainy, so that everything, including Blanchard, seemed to steam. Blanchard wiped his face again.

"Lawson will be back in a minute with your cases. Then we'll get out of this."

The young man, Lawson, returned shortly, weaving an alert way through the taxis, with my baggage. The chauffeur found driving-space, and we came out into a jammed street. Here a sharp rat-tat-tat blasted my ears.

"Pay no attention to that," Blanchard said. "It's only a machine-gun."

Well, a good New Yorker knows the difference between a machine-gun and a riveting-machine. Nevertheless, I smiled politely, and we arrived at a vast hotel which towered up into

the grey, rainy sky, where the assiduous secretary left my baggage.

We then toured the city. Blanchard and the secretary both pointed out business and cultural centres until we had visited the magnificent Chicago University campus and arrived at the Stock Yard Inn and the steak I have mentioned.

Here, however, Blanchard was obliged to return to his office and turned me over to young Lawson. "North Shore," he said to him. "You know the ropes. Stop at the Art Institute first. We can't let him miss that. Then show him Lincoln Park—" He was looking at his watch, fixing a time-table. "By that time he'll want to go back to the hotel for a rest. I'll pick you up, Wickwyre, at five."

Young Lawson nodded. "Yes, sir. Shall I telephone Wilson now?"

"Wilson?"

"To confirm your Monday appointment?"

"Oh." Blanchard seemed slightly put out, but nodded. "Certainly."

He brooded as the thin young man slid alertly away. "These young men! Too damned efficient. Makes me feel old." He passed a hand over his white hair and said wistfully, "Maybe I *am* old."

I knew too well what he meant and said so, and both of us brooded. However, presently he cheered up. "But there's life in us old boys yet," he said. "By the way, Wickwyre, don't mind our jokes about murder. We do it only to shock the New Yorkers. To outdo them. Stupid joke, really. Matter of fact, Chicago is no worse in that respect than other cities." He eyed me shrewdly. "You don't shock easily, do you?"

"I've lived in New York a long time," I replied, not too obliquely, and then young Lawson came back.

After we dropped Blanchard at the bank, Lawson took up the role of guide. First we must visit the Art Institute, which we did, greatly to my pleasure, although Lawson kept looking at a very elegant watch on his wrist and rather hustled me along.

When we emerged, he permitted me an extra moment or two. "There's a view from the terrace," he said, and guided me along a wide, balustraded terrace and round a corner.

There was a view of a wet and dripping park below us. There was also a view of a high wall, shielded by shrubbery, behind which there came a crashing rumble and roar that met and joined the roar of Michigan Avenue on our right.

"Trains," he explained, at my questioning glance. "The Illinois Central tracks. The Planetarium is in that direction. I'm sorry you can't see it . . ."

It was beginning to rain, and the visibility was poor. The wall blocked off one side of the small park which lay immediately below us, and at the end of it a bank, heavy with shrubbery, went up to a street some distance above our level. Across Michigan Avenue lights made bright patterns, outlining the great buildings against the dark sky. " Smog," Lawson said. " Expect you have it in New York. This is one of Chicago's dark days."

A very pretty blonde girl in a brilliant green raincoat rounded the terrace, shot an angry look in our direction as if we had no business there, and went down some steps into the park. I watched her idly until she disappeared into heavy shrubbery at a distant corner where masonry and thick foliage shut off the flash of green.

Lawson was continuing, ". . . And there's Orchestra Hall—"

An odd sound struck my ear.

" Surely that was a scream, Lawson," I said.

He gave me a startled glance. " Oh, I don't think so," he said. We both listened. There was certainly nothing now except the heavy roar of traffic along the avenue, the roar and rumble of trains below the wall.

I was staring at the corner of the wall where the girl in green had disappeared. It *had* sounded like a scream. But as I looked, there was a vivid flash of green emerging above the level of the little park. Obviously there were steps hidden by the shrubbery. The flapping green raincoat reached the top and hovered there.

A green hood blew back, showing black hair. " Dear me," I said, " it's a different girl."

Lawson gave me a long look. " I was about to point out the bronze lions at the Institute entrance. They weigh—" I hadn't missed the lions—nobody could. But I never heard their weight, for the girl still lingered at the top of the invisible steps.

I stared at her and then at the thick shrubbery in the corner and said, " I rather think there's something wrong down there. We'd better take a look."

" But—you can't be serious, Mr. Wickwyre."

I was very serious indeed. Another train rumbled and clattered along the tracks below the wall. The girl in green strolled slowly eastwards.

I didn't like it. I didn't like any of it. I said, " I'm going down there."

He sprang to attention. " Stay where you are, Mr. Wickwyre! I'll see about it! " He ran down the steps and along the winding, murky paths.

The rain obscured my vision; the loud clatter and rumble of

the train and the traffic were confusing. I pulled my hat lower to keep the rain out of my eyes, waited a moment or two, trying to conquer my disquiet, and then followed him. As I approached the corner where the wall projected, I collided with young Lawson, hurrying back to meet me.

His face gleamed white in the rain. He cried wildly, " There's a woman! She's dead! What shall I do? "

A train hooted dismally. I shouted, " Call a policeman! Get the nearest traffic cop! "

He gave me another wild look and plunged back towards the terrace. I went on round the corner.

A girl in a green raincoat lay there, her pretty face full in the rain, her green hood framing blonde curls. It was the girl who had passed us on the terrace. Lawson was quite right. She was dead.

I felt her pulse. I saw the bruise on her face. I looked at the crimson patch on her coat. She had been shot. I hadn't heard it. Unless—had I heard what I had automatically taken to be a loud back-fire?

I couldn't be sure of that. But certainly it was a spot extraordinarily well chosen for murder with a gun. The honking and thud of traffic on the avenue and the cross-street above, the roar and clatter of trains behind the wall effectually covered the sound of a gun.

A sense of an imperative need to hurry nudged me. The other woman in green was now rapidly escaping. By the time Lawson and the police arrived she would have lost herself in the shadows of the murky day, never to be found or identified.

The steps she had ascended were now almost beside me. I ran up them and came out upon a pavement bordering a wide street, heavy with traffic. The train was still rumbling along below me, a goods train, for I glanced over the wall and down upon a thick network of tracks. Then I saw a flash of vivid green in the distance and hurried after it, skirting a vast area of parking-space.

Her pace was just slow enough to suggest that I might overtake her and just fast enough to prevent my doing so. Eventually I realized that she was heading back towards Michigan Avenue, and reached the street in time to see her board a large bus, which immediately trundled away northwards.

Blanchard's car and chauffeur, waiting somewhere near the Art Institute, would have been useful but there was no time to return for them. However, an empty taxi came along and I hailed it.

"Follow that bus," I said tersely, and the driver of the cab did so.

It was not an easy task; other buses and automobiles crowded around us. I got my breath and meditated and watched the bus, which the driver followed with surprising expertness and docility, rather as if I might thrust a gun in his ribs at any moment.

It was an odd impression—not quite so odd when I caught a glimpse of my face in his mirror. Owing to my drenched hat, pulled low over my eyes, and some grimy smears from the wet and smoke-stained shrubbery, I did have, I must admit, a look of unconscionable villainy.

His eyes met mine in the mirror. He blinked and said with extraordinary meekness that it might be a long ride. It was a very long ride, indeed. We kept behind the bus, taking a desperate chance now and then with traffic lights, and every time the bus stopped, I watched for a green coat to disgorge itself, and it never did.

We went on and on and on, through a park, along the lake, and on. I wondered how Lawson was making out with the police.

In fact, I thought of a number of things and I wished I could stop and make one or two telephone calls. Automatically, I watched the thinning numbers of passengers who emerged at the various bus stops. I roused myself when at last the bus appeared to be circling back on its own tracks, and leaned forward again. "Where are we?"

"Evanston. Bus is starting back to Chicago." The driver twisted round to look at me. "Still want to follow?"

I nodded. The woman in green had not got off the bus, so she was still there.

We started back to Chicago through the early dusk of the dark and rainy day.

It was so dark and foggy that when she did get down from the bus, I nearly missed her, and I only happened to see the flash of green moving rapidly along the pavement.

"Stop, stop!" I cried. "How much do I owe you?"

It was a very substantial sum, and the driver seemed relieved to get it. Then he shot a glance at the green figure hurrying along the walk. "For goodness' sake," he said in a disgusted way, "a dame!" and gave me a look which, even in my haste, I preferred not to interpret. Especially since at that instant the green coat vanished, apparently into the bowels of the earth.

I hurried after it and discovered steps going down into a murky tunnel—a pedestrian crossing under the avenue. I ran through it and came out upon another long strip of park, following the curve of the lake.

The green coat was swinging purposefully along a path ahead of me and towards the lake. Down to the very edge of the lake, in fact, and as one arm went up in a vigorous throwing curve, I reached the woman and caught her arm.

She whirled round. There was a short, sharp struggle. Then I got a rather singular object in my hand. It was a small hammer, a household tool. But a lethal tool. She was panting and angry. She was a young woman, pretty in a florid and forceful way, with fine dark eyes.

"You—" she cried and then screamed at someone behind me, "Arrest this man. He's been following me!"

Two large policemen loomed out of the dusk behind me. One cried, "It's him!" The other laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. "James Wickwyre? You're under arrest. We've been hunting for you all afternoon. Every patrol car in the city's been alerted. It's murder!"

"What's this?" the other policeman demanded and seized my hand with the hammer in it. "*He was going to kill her, too!*"

It was not a moment conducive to composure. I said rather hurriedly that I'd go with them. "But kindly arrest this young woman." I then became aware of the fact that the green coat had again very simply and quietly vanished.

There was nothing much that could be done about it. One policeman gripped me unrelentingly. The other made a rather cursory search of the nearby clumps of shrubbery.

Dusk dropped down. The woman in the green coat was gone. They hustled me into a police-car.

At police Headquarters my arrival aroused considerable interest. However, I was permitted to telephone to Mr. Blanchard. In the interests of the accepted amenities of speech, I shall pass over his comments.

In twenty minutes he arrived, with a lawyer, his secretary Lawson, and an apoplectic countenance. In ten minutes more I was given to understand that I was not under arrest.

Indeed, young Lawson, after providing me with an alibi, apologized most abjectly. Pursuing me had been entirely a police idea. They had made him describe me; they would not accept his statement concerning me and my identity and my position as an innocent bystander. He was abject and also worried, wiping his white face and eyeing his employer with trepidation.

The rich shade of purple in Blanchard's face deepened. "You're fired, Lawson!"

"Just a minute, Blanchard," I said. "Is this young man married?"

" Yes," Lawson said, with an imploring look at his employer. Married. And doubtless getting an extremely moderate salary.

I turned to the police lieutenant at the desk beside us. " Who was the murdered woman? "

He glanced at a form on his desk. " Identified by the cards in her handbag. Name, Marie Garten. Unmarried. Lived alone—very luxurious apartment. Had plenty of money, inherited. No robbery, so there's no motive there."

I looked at Lawson. " Exactly what happened after I left you? "

He was prompt and exact, although still apologetic. " I reported it to the traffic cop. A patrol car got there and then the homicide squad. They removed the body and asked me to make a report at Headquarters, which I did. I was obliged to mention you, Mr. Wickwyre. I couldn't help it. I didn't know what happened to you, and naturally I was worried, being in a way responsible for you. I told the police you had nothing to do with the murder."

" How was the young woman murdered? " I asked the lieutenant.

The lieutenant replied, " Gun shot. Through the heart."

" Was there a bruise on her face? A bruise that might have caused unconsciousness? "

He shrugged. " Might have. If it occurred before she was shot."

I didn't pursue that. It was their problem. I said to Blanchard, " When was the Board meeting postponed? "

He looked puzzled. " Late yesterday afternoon. We tried to reach you in New York, but you'd already left."

It answered a very urgent question. It had seemed to be a swiftly improvised murder, yet it couldn't have been that, for one does not habitually carry a gun, even in Chicago. But there had been twelve hours to plan and prepare to take advantage of the opportunity that might arise.

I said to the police lieutenant, " Did you find the gun? "

They hadn't. Everybody looked at the small hammer on the desk. I felt rather sick, and also deeply angry. It was a remarkably cold-blooded murder. I looked at Blanchard. " Have you ever seen Mrs. Lawson? "

Blanchard looked startled. " Sure. Dark young woman, attractive. Fine black eyes."

I was angry and tired. " I'll go back to my hotel now, if I'm permitted to do so. Meantime—" It was strangely difficult, and I cleared my throat before I said it—" there's your murderer. It's Lawson."

Somebody—I think Blanchard—gave a kind of gurgle. I said, "I suggest you get hold of his wife and question her. Find out what Lawson's been spending. He dresses too well for his salary. Find out where he got his money. Get somebody who has seen Lawson and this murdered girl together."

I glanced at Blanchard. "I doubt if that telephone call to—Wilson, wasn't it?—was ever really made.

"I rather think that in fact Lawson telephoned his wife, told her their plan had a chance to work. He also telephoned Marie Garten and made a date to meet her at the exact corner where she was murdered. Miss Garten, however, came up on the terrace and walked past us. She gave Lawson an angry look, but didn't speak to him, nor he to her, so I take it that their association was definitely sub rosa—not to be acknowledged if they met while Lawson was, so to speak, on the job—and obviously, that there had been a quarrel between them.

"She went to the agreed corner of the wall to wait for him. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lawson, intentionally wearing a green coat like Miss Garten's, was waiting there for her. Probably she had balked at murder herself, but she knocked out Marie with that hammer to make murder easy and certain.

"Somebody screamed. Since the scream was meant to attract my attention, I think it was Mrs. Lawson. She then went up the steps to a spot from which her green coat would be visible from the terrace where I stood. Naturally I watched."

I took a breath. No one spoke, so I went on: "At that point, what I can only call a certain genius for murder began to operate. I had heard a scream. A different young woman, dark-haired but in a green coat, came up the steps. I had to investigate. But Lawson, the ever-efficient young man, dashed down to do it for me. With excellent timing, the woman in the green raincoat drifted rather slowly away.

"I waited and then followed Lawson, who dashed out again from the corner, shouting murder. I told him to call the police. I looked at the murdered woman, and then did what was expected of me. I followed the second woman."

"But the Garten woman was shot," the lieutenant said.

"Oh yes. Lawson did it. It takes a remarkably short time to pull a trigger. I didn't hear the shot. I was some distance away. It may have been a small calibre—"

"It was—" the lieutenant began.

I continued, "And the loud clatter of the train below covered the sound of the shot."

I looked at Blanchard, who was dangerously swollen and red. I said to the lieutenant, "I had to be got out of the way. I had

served my purpose—a witness, an alibi, and more important, someone who could not possibly have recognized either Marie or Mrs. Lawson.

" Once I was induced to follow a will-o'-the-wisp in green, Lawson had a chance and the necessary time to hide the revolver. I don't know where, but it required time. I'm sorry my disappearance obscured the simple, primary facts. Shall we go, Blanchard? "

"Simple," the lieutenant said. " Elementary." He roused himself. " Is this an accusation of murder, Mr. Wickwyre? "

I said politely, " Lieutenant, I suggest that you investigate along those lines."

" And hold Lawson," Blanchard said, with a snap of his teeth. " Come on, Wickwyre."

The lawyer remained behind.

At his club Blanchard ordered two double whiskies. We drank in deep silence, and I was relieved to see his colour fade once more to its normal pink.

" They'll phone us here," he said at last. " Waiter—another of the same."

But instead of telephoning, the police lieutenant came himself and, since it was after hours, he accepted a double whisky.

" Mr. Wickwyre was right," he said. " Marie Garten was Lawson's girl-friend; she lent him money. He got into a tight spot on the market. Marie wanted her money back, especially when he began to cool towards her. Marie threatened to tell you the whole story.

" Lawson told his wife, and they decided to get rid of her. He seems to have fixed up the plan. Wanted an alibi, somebody who didn't know either Marie or his wife, and whose word would carry more weight.

" We've got his wife. She can't testify against her husband, but we've got enough. We've got the revolver, by the way. It was wrapped in today's newspaper and checked in the cloakroom at the Art Institute. He desperately needed a little time, for he had to check the parcel and then stick around inside the building until he saw a chance to get out without being seen by the attendant, who would have wondered about it. Too much."

He glanced at me. " Once he got you out of the way, Mr. Wickwyre, a few minutes' delay in reporting the murder wouldn't matter. Who was there to say there had been a delay? "

I didn't say, " Tut-tut, Wickwyre," but I felt it. I ought to have remembered the cloakroom—obvious.

He went on: " Mrs. Lawson must have felt that you had given

up and returned to the city. She had to get rid of the hammer."

He sighed. "Smart young man—real talent."

"Too smart," Blanchard said.

The police lieutenant turned to me. "What put you onto it, Mr. Wickwyre? I mean, I understand about the scream but—"

"Coincidence," I said, and stopped. The main fact, of course, was that there had been the jokes about murder and Chicago. But those had been from Blanchard, and they had been coincidence. There had been more than that.

"The two green coats," I said. "The same colour might have been coincidence. But, if not, was there a deliberate plan on the part of somebody? And to accomplish what? To make certain of my interest, so I would question the oddity of the similarity—and be the more likely to follow the second green coat? A subtle suggestion. Did it suggest a subtle plan to lead me away from the scene? But who had brought me to that scene?"

I shrugged. "Then everything added up."

Both men looked slightly suspicious. Perhaps they sensed an omission, for Blanchard said, rather dubiously, "In any event, you got the right answer."

The police lieutenant was looking at me oddly. "I always thought New Yorkers were sort of simple—" He blushed, checked himself, and added soberly, "But you'd do all right in Chicago, Mr. Wickwyre."

It was an accolade, a verbal decoration. I took it as such and thanked him.

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

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Little Peach

by John Pudney

"THE little peach," cried Edith.

"Isn't it?" said Uncle Edward.

"*Him*," snarled Edith.

"Of course," apologized Uncle Edward. "I was forgetting."

"Forgetting, at a moment like this?"

The little peach lay in clothes of cambric and lace, which had been in the family for two generations. He represented continuity, promise, achievement: and the family duly forgathered.

On such occasions of temperate little gatherings to celebrate or to mourn, Uncle Edward was suffered. It was an offence if he refused to attend; equally, it was an offence if he behaved in a decently hilarious manner. Uncle Edward never willingly gave offence; he suffered as he was suffered. Naturally, he struck most of them as being rather silly; for these were busy people, engrossed in themselves and unconscious of virtue in others. Uncle Edward was not smart. He was often vulgar.

For gatherings where social prestige was rigidly upheld, the presence of Uncle Edward was to be discouraged. But at strictly family gatherings he was included as a cause of self-congratulation, to demonstrate, not only to him but to all of them, how their own self-application had bettered them.

"Now, Uncle Edward must really see *him*," cried Muriel.

"But I have just seen *him*," said Uncle Edward.

"Oh, but that's nonsense, Uncle Edward, you haven't been near the child. You must try and take some interest, you know, in the new generation."

"Oh yes," murmured Uncle Edward, leaning right over the infant, gently approaching his forefinger to one of the pink hands, muttering to himself that there could be no doubt after this about his having seen it, anyway.

"*Him*, you fool," barked a thick, husky voice in his ear.

"What was that?" said Uncle George.

"What was what?" snapped Edith, exchanging a glance with Muriel, and with it the suspicion that Uncle Edward had, as usual, been tippling.

"Oh, I just thought I heard something," said Uncle Edward, his finger still imprisoned in the tiny pink hand.

"So you did, you ass," barked the little voice, "but don't let them make a fool of you; just keep quiet about it."

No mistake this time. The voice came as sharp and shrill and husky against his left ear as the voice of a Pomeranian dog. Uncle Edward rolled his eyes towards the face of the infant he had tended, from defensive habit, to avoid.

One of the round, moist baby eyes closed in a smart wink. "We chaps must see this through together," muttered the baby.

Uncle Edward was a grocer in a good way of business: but nobody in the family mentioned that, because Uncle Edward was in the habit of wearing an apron and saying Ma'am to customers. Now that the family had achieved a certain status, Uncle Edward's calling had become something of an embarrassment. There was no place for a relative in an apron where golf handicaps, canasta, and income-tax anecdotes made up a broth of lively conversation in the lounges of mortgaged homes.

It was Edith who had written in the first instance announcing that he was to be a godfather, as that office "helped to keep a family together." Uncle Edward, you see, made plenty of money at his grocery.

Everybody became inarticulate and glum as they entered the church, just as they would have been ostentatious and chatty as they entered the tennis club. They tiptoed in a procession led by the carried infant in a pink bonnet.

"What do we have to say?" inquired Uncle Edward, as they reached the font.

Edith thrust a card into his hand, printed *Baptism of Infants*. "It's all on there. And remember you say the names Ernest Delancey . . ."

"But why Delancey?"

Edith and Muriel coloured. All looked down their noses.

"There you go again," grumbled the husky little voice. "Can't you see it's just swank?"

"If you must know, Uncle Edward," whispered Muriel, "we thought we'd commemorate the name of our avenue."

"Makes you laugh, don't it?" tweaked the baby.

Uncle Edward grinned—the height of bad taste in church, as they said afterwards. The clergyman hurried in, glanced at the

company, and began: "Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin . . ."

Uncle Edward was never out of earshot of the precocious child and thanked heaven on the spot that there had been born a wit into the family at last. To cover his pleasure and amusement, he joined in the responses with gusto, saying them in a fruity voice as if he meant them, which no well-bred person does in church.

"Now I'm for it!" announced the choleric infant after these prayers and exhortations. "Think the water's cold today?"

Uncle Edward nodded sympathetically as the cambric and lace garments were trussed round the infant form, ready for the handing over to the clergyman.

"To have you as a spiritual father gives me great pleasure," continued the baby. "But I must ask an immediate favour. I want you to exercise your authority and get rid of that silly snob name. I shall only get ragged at school, you know. Look out, here we go!" The vicar took him with slight distaste. He stared at the vicar with equal distaste. At Uncle Edward he winked one pink-lidded eye piteously.

"Look at him, the peach!" somebody sighed.

Uncle Edward shuffled closer. "Scream like the devil," he whispered to the infant, "while I think. It will hold things up, and it's quite the proper thing to do."

They all looked at Uncle Edward because he seemed to be talking to himself, and they silently agreed that he was praying in public, which is the sort of thing foreigners do. They sighed. They hoped it would soon be over, lest their embarrassment overtook their decorum.

Then the baby yelled; and at first they were pleased because it meant he was getting rid of the devil. He went on yelling, however, and held up everything. Everybody tried to stop him. The noise stunned them. The clergyman tried to proceed. They saw his lips move, asking Uncle Edward the child's name. But he couldn't make himself heard. All their efforts at quelling the din failed.

Then Uncle Edward leaned across and put his forefinger in the angry little pink hand that flayed the air.

There was immediate silence: and none but the attuned ears of the grocer heard the husky voice whisper: "Thanks, old cock. You and I understand each other perfectly."

The clergyman, taking a new, more courageous grip upon the cambric and lace, hastened to take his chance. "Name this child."

"Ernest Slough . . ." boomed Uncle Edward in response.

"Ernest Slough . . ." hurriedly affirmed the clergyman, swilling

the cold water, determined to make a job of this baptism in the blessed silence following the devil's departure.

"But—" gasped Muriel.

"But—" snarled Edith.

"Delancey!" came the ragged whisper from them all. It was not decent to interrupt a church service, but here was desperate need.

"Ernest Slough," repeated Uncle Edward with unshakable confidence as the clergyman impatiently paused, and the husky voice of the baptized crowed, "Good for you!"

There was a moment's pause. Looks jabbed the silence like barbed umbrellas. To interrupt was the limit of decorum, to argue was out of the question. One by one the heads of the family bowed, but not in prayer.

Only Uncle Edward and the poor, pretty peach prayed for strength to sustain them during the christening tea that was to follow.

The cushions were smoothed, the tea was poured, a nervous silence was allowed to settle. "Now, Uncle Edward, perhaps you'll explain. We all agreed on Ernest Delancey. What could have made you say Slough?"

"You wanted him called after the name of the place," said Uncle Edward firmly. "And Slough it is. It's solid and British and easy to say. I think it's much better than Delancey."

"But what will the child think, the poor peach, the—"

"He thinks it's thoroughly sensible," thoughtlessly answered Uncle Edward.

They looked at him then in an odd way, putting down their cups; but, as their mouths opened in surprise, anger, and indignation, Ernest let out a wild, disturbing crescendo of sound, for all the world like the crowd cheering a score at a Cup Final. Like a good trouper, he continued for twenty minutes while they, deafened and speechless, cajoled him, jigged him, jogged him, and fondled him. He drove every thought and reproach from their anxious minds.

At length he caught his uncle's eye. They beckoned the crestfallen grocer to his side. Uncle Edward picked him up and took him into the conservatory out of sight.

Shakily, as the yelling diminished, they picked up their cups of cold tea. "We must have it out with Uncle Edward," said Edith. "We'd better decide what to say."

"He's certainly pacifying the poor little soul."

"So much the better. Now, what's to be done?"

There was little enough to be done, they decided, but to rebuke

Uncle Edward and, in the interests of social respectability, to have no more to do with him; to go so far, indeed, as to tell him so, to run no more risks of being let down in the eyes of the world. Money or no money, they agreed, there were limits to good taste . . .

Instinctively forming themselves into a body, they rose to make this pronouncement in the conservatory, where now there was no sound but the contented creak of the swing hammock, upon which there were still four instalments to be found from somewhere.

The pronouncement was never made.

For there, sitting at ease, were Uncle Edward and the baby, each puffing at rather expensive green cigars like old acquaintances making decisions of their own—financial and otherwise.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Minutely.* 5, *Messes.* 9, *Roundels.* 10, *Medici.* 12, *On hand.* 13, *Seagreen.* 15, *Ash Wednesday.* 18, *Putting-green.* 23, *Carpeted.* 24, *Mimosa.* 26, *Breath.* 27, *Grey mare.* 28, *Runway.* 29, *Pussy-cat.*

Down. 1, *Maroon.* 2, *Nought.* 3, *Tidings.* 4, *Lyly.* 6, *Epergne.* 7, *Stipends.* 8, *Spinneys.* 11, *Tenders.* 14, *Swagger.* 16, *Space-bar.* 17, *Sturgeon.* 19, *Inertia.* 20, *Erinyes.* 21, *Mosaic.* 22, *Patent.* 25, *Urdu.*

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 24

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's twenty-fourth Prize Crossword Competition:—

Mrs. R. H. Beeson, Ravensbourne Park, London S.E.6.
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G. D. Hurrell Esq., Bemersyde Drive, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2.
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Mrs. Stewart-Fergusson, Bruntsfield Hotel, Edinburgh 10.

These readers who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Endlessly.* 6, *Had up.* 9, *Differs.* 10, *Kinsman.* 11, *Ada.* 12, *Loop the loop.* 14, *Oversee.* 15, *Kind sir.* 17, *Resting.* 20, *Pobbles.* 22, *Wranglesome.* 23, *Cud.* 24, *Returns.* 26, *Treason.* 27, *Honey.* 28, *Demi-tasse.*

Down. 1, *Endeavour.* 2, *Deflate.* 3, *Everlasting.* 4, *Systole.* 5, *Yakutsk.* 6, *Hen.* 7, *Damsons.* 8, *Pin up.* 13, *Ennoblement.* 16, *Residence.* 18, *Spartan.* 19, *Greased.* 20, *Poor Tom.* 21, *Locusts.* 22, *Worth.* 25, *Roy.*

COST OF LOVING

Oh, the man that has me
Must have silver and gold

Polly Perkins

The airship seemed to fill the whole field, tethered a few feet from the ground by innumerable cables over which they stumbled painfully on the way to the steps. These had been covered by a socially minded caterer with a strip of red carpet . . .

Adam went aloft to a kind of terrace. Acres of inflated silk blotted out the sky, stirring just perceptibly in the breeze. The lights of other cars arriving lit up the uneven grass. A few louts had collected round the gates to jeer. There were two people making love to each other near him on the terrace, reclining on cushions. There was also a young woman he did not know, holding one of the stays and breathing heavily; evidently she felt unwell. One of the lovers lit a cigar and Adam observed that they were Mary Mouse and the Maharajah of Pukkapore.

Presently Nina joined him. "It seems such a waste," she said, thinking of Mary and the Maharajah, "that two very rich people like that should fall in love with each other."

EVELYN WAUGH, *Vile Bodies*

Private Enterprise

He sat up to see if Marie-Jeanne had fallen asleep. Her eyes were closed; her small brown hand lay along the arm of the chair, holding a cigarette. Nicolas smiled. He was about to remove the cigarette when he stopped short, noticing one of the three men make a gesture as if he wanted a word with him . . . Nicolas smiled and rose.

The other fellow joined him at the bar. He was a large young

man, taller than Nicolas; he stood stiffly before him, his sparse fair hair combed carefully back from his long face, stammering out his request.

" What? " said Nicolas, slipping easily into his as-yet-unknown role, one hand in his pocket, the other resting on the bar. It gives a man a feeling of assurance to be faced with someone who doesn't know how to say what he wants.

" I apologize for disturbing you," said the young man. " It's a little awkward . . ."

Then, all in one breath: " I wanted your permission to ask the lady with you for a dance."

Lady? It seemed such an odd word for Marie-Jeanne that Nicolas hesitated for a moment. Then he assumed a knowing look. " Splendid! " he said.

He started to laugh and, staring fixedly at the other, who was blushing, he added: " That'll be a hundred francs."

A look of astonishment spread over the face of the tall, fair boy. Nicolas was enjoying himself. He placed one finger on the forehead of the young man, who started back.

" Not so fast-working, what goes on in there. You give me one hundred francs; in exchange, I introduce you to the lady. One good turn deserves another. Where've you been brought up? If I weren't a gentleman, I would ask twice as much."

FÉLICIEN MARCEAU, *The China Shepherdess*

Gold Standard

What is gold worth, say,
Worth for work or play,
Worth to keep or pay,
Hide or throw away,
Hope about or fear?
What is love worth, pray?
Worth a tear?

Golden on the mould
Lie the dead leaves roll'd
Of the wet woods old,
Yellow leaves and cold,
Woods without a dove;
Gold is worth but gold;
Love's worth love.

A. C. SWINBURNE,
Child's Song

Unaccountable

" Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know: one is, how much money your uncle has laid down to bring it about; and the other, how I am ever to pay him."

" Money! My uncle!" cried Jane. " What do you mean, sir?"

" I mean, that no man in his senses would marry Lydia on so slight a temptation as one hundred a year during my life, and fifty after I am gone . . . Wickham's a fool if he takes her with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of him, in the very beginning of our relationship."

JANE AUSTEN, *Pride and Prejudice*

Heart Free

Fine knacks for ladies, cheap, choice, brave, and new,
Good pennyworths—but money cannot move:
I keep a fair but for the Fair to view;
A beggar may be liberal of love.
Though all my wares be trash, the heart is true—
The heart is true.

Author Unknown

Diamond Bill

Mouse, bending over the tiara which she was building up, turned sick at his tone. She dared not resent it. She was vaguely but intensely alarmed, and she was aware that this man, so long her butt and jest, was her master . . .

" My signature? " she repeated in an unsteady voice.

" You've got the jewels, my beauty. You can't have no more."

" Then it is not generosity! " said Mouse passionately, and very unwarily betraying her unfounded hopes.

" No, my dear," he answered, " I never said 'twas." Then he put his two big knotted yellow hands one on each knee, and looked at her mercilessly. " Think I'll take my payment now, or else the di'monds," he said, with a vile chuckle.

She felt his odious grasp on her bare arms and his loathsome breath on her cheek.

" Don't cry out, my beauty, or you'll lose your di'monds," he said, with his lips on her shell-like ear. " You've got to be fond of Billy now! "

OUIDA, *The Massarenes*

City of the Sun - Ecija

by Laurie Lee

Well-known as a poet, Laurie Lee will also be remembered for his distinguished work on the film, "Cyprus is an Island." He now turns to Spain, and in this extract from his new travel book shows us the dramatic contrasts of that land of sun and shadow, magnificence and poverty.

WE came to the city of the sun on the night of a full moon which rose like a tide over the azulejo towers and hollow rat-filled palaces. We had journeyed for five hours through Seville's December cold, but as we dropped down into Ecija the gusty winds went still, and the moonlight seemed to collect in warm pools along the little streets and to drip off the white walls with a visual texture as smooth and as tender as oil.

The centre of the city, antique and antic now with the social stir of the evening, greeted us with a glare and jostle that owed nothing to neon lights and motor-horns but was all of a natural piece, homespun and roughly local.

It was the hour of *paseo*: boys called neat-turned adorations to their girls; loud cries from gritty throats celebrated the reunion of friends who had not seen each other for at least thirty minutes; lottery-ticket sellers chanted their chances of fortune; and a hoarse town crier, with drum and trumpet, announced a sale of mules. Around the square there were palm trees, white arches, and blind secret windows; and it seemed as though the Moors had only left that morning.

It did not take us long to find our footing here. No sooner had we unloaded our bags upon the pavement, than six strong

boys surrounded us, and with loud and eager civility promised to carry us to the lodgings of princes. They had tattered clothes, bare feet, and the dark shapely faces of Arabs; they shouted and flashed their moonlit teeth and before we knew what was happening each had seized an article of luggage and all made off in different directions.

We were saved from this dilemma by a late arrival on the scene—a porter with a monstrous square head, sad eyes, and a capacity for tempestuous rages. Screaming into the night, he called back every boy, stripped each of his load, piled it back on the pavement, checked it, and then, with a miraculous arrangement of arms and legs, shouldered the lot, and with a crooked smile staggered away before us to the Hotel Comercio, which he represented.

The Hotel Comercio was about as commercial as the cave of Ali Baba. Around the vast shadowy patio, shepherds, in fleece-lined coats, sat eating and drinking. Boot-blacks on their knees seized and polished the boots of anyone who stood for a moment near them. Two farmers were tasting each other's crop of olives and spitting them out with epithets of disgust. And a magnificent gipsy wandered among the throng, selling silver Virgins and cures for love.

The hotel office was a glass box, set like a fish-tank in the corner of the patio. Enclosed within its shining walls sat a handsome Sevillana to welcome us. She had heavily made-up eyes, a bursting poppy mouth, and hair like two gallons of coal tar. She left her crystal office and showed us to a bedroom full of white pillars, arches, and fretted wooden panelling, for which, with food, we were asked to pay the price of one indifferent meal in a Knightsbridge café.

After a supper of squid and goat's flesh, we went out into the street and watched the moon flashing on the azulejo towers. They stood around in a rich mysterious company, brooding and glittering above the city roofs with ornate, unearthly presences. There were perhaps a dozen of them, all of a similar decayed magnificence, and every few minutes one or other shivered to the stroke of a bell which told one nothing dependable about the time but which filled the night air with a succession of soft feathery sounds as from magical beings who called to each other.

As we walked through the brilliant midnight streets, birds on the warm walls sang as though it were day. And little beggar girls came up out of the shadows and smiled at us and asked us our names. Astride their hips each carried a sleeping babe, the body of each was smoke-black under its rags, their dark curls were caught in tangles which only scissors would ever unravel,

their feet were bare, their eyes diseased, but their smiles were the roundest in the world.

With them we went to the booths under the arcades and bought cakes, nuts, and sunflower seeds. With them we sat round the moon-twinkling fountain and ate a second supper. It was a gay ravenous meal, and the sleeping infants were awakened and forced to share it. Pieces of sugar cake were pressed to their drowsy mouths; with eyes still closed they chewed and swallowed, they groaned and gasped in half a dream, they were coated with sleep like fur. But the young mothers, by shakes and cries and kisses, made sure the little ones knew what they were eating. It would have been improper otherwise.

The next morning was golden with inevitable sun, and Ecija was at last revealed in all its decayed and gilded splendour. Ecija is a small country town between Seville and Cordova. The Romans called it Astigi, the "city of the sun;" but Paco, the hotel porter, calls it "the frying-pan of the world."

Lying in a depression among the hills, it is like a lake of sun, a reservoir of heat. It has a river, but never a breeze. In summer it is so hot that the very natives fall dead in the streets. Even this morning, in mid December, the sun had the warmth of an English May, though faintly water-cooled to give it freshness.

As we walked abroad again and looked about us the daylit towers seemed to be stuck all over with wet violets, a moist and effervescent blue as though they were still sweating from the moonlight they had absorbed the night before. All round the square, under the African palms, old men, wearing black Cordobese hats, sat in stiff rows like figures at a judgment.

Late in their life though it may have been, these ancients still had a sharp eye for a pretty woman. As Kati walked by, they looked at her hard from under their hats. "Behold!" said one, "how like a ham she is." "Oh, for a knife and fork!" cried a second. "Silence," growled a third. "Don't you see that she is a married woman?" "Ah," said the first with a sigh, "but that she were a widow for only five hours."

Soon the beggar children espied us again, and came running across the square, shouting our names and shaking out their verminous black locks. The infants hanging from their hips were now sleepily awake, peering around them with little red eyes. We all went down to the river-bank and sat by the water, and the children talked about their lives.

Isabela, the eldest, led the conversation, as she led in all things. She was about twelve years old, had a golden grimy face, and a manner of supreme and pretty confidence in the world.

"Our family is stupendous," she said. "There are ten of us and we live in one room. We have a table and chair and we cook in the street." She began to giggle. "We haven't a bed. We sleep on straw. And for this room we pay four shillings a month."

She was not complaining so much as asking us to share in a joke. But one of the company, a boy with a diseased skin, considered she was boasting.

"I pay nothing for my house," he said. "It is mine."

"It's not," said Isabela, "it's your mother's."

"Well, that's the same."

"Anyway, it's not much of a house—all tins and palm leaves."

"But it is ours," said the boy.

The children all began to flow with information, competing with and contradicting each other. I asked them what their fathers did. They were all dead. "Mine." "Mine, too." "And mine." "Yes, it is true. All dead."

They announced the fact with bright smiles, making gestures of sleeping with their hands. One had died of a cold, one of a fever, another apparently of eating beans. Two had been shot—*bang! bang!*—but I could not gather by whom. Yet I believed them, for Spain is a country of dead fathers, and today there are a million young widows in that country who will never see a second husband.

Another girl, up to her thighs in the river, was washing her brother's head. Her dark brown face was tender and beautiful, and her thick hair, matted with dirt and straw, gave her the ageless look of a bronze sculpture.

"We sleep in a bed in our house," she said. "Three at the top and two at the bottom. And if we don't bring home ten reales every day, we are beaten."

Everybody squirmed with laughter at this. Filthy radiant faces were convulsed. It was obviously a private joke. Only the diseased boy looked solemn.

"Nobody beats me," he said. "I buy all my own clothes."

At the mention of clothes, the girl in the river lifted her dirty coloured dress and began to catalogue the sources of her garments. Behold the torn dress, given; the short tattered vest, given; the canvas rag of shoes, bought—from the mother of Carmencita, who died. "They are good," she said, "and I wear nothing else."

There, by the river, we spent the sunny morning. The thick green waters went slowly by, like summer grasses flowing in a breeze. The girls chattered. And the boy lay back, and gazed up through the eucalyptus trees, and sang in a voice as gentle as a bird's, over and over again, this pretty song:

How beautiful is my truelove,
How beautiful when she sleeps.
She is like a red poppy
Within the green wheat.

Ecija at noon was a city of black and gold—gold of the roofs and towers in the sun, and black of the shadowed alleys and of the widows passing through them. A breathless provincial quiet hung over the tiny world, choking the young men as they walked like prisoners to the churches.

Yet beneath all this, the stones and the flesh, the pagan world lay close. Enrique, the savage old barber in the square, could talk about Astigi as though it were just around the corner. Under the prim paths of the municipal gardens, he told me, lay an elaborate Roman pavement of gladiators, goddesses, and leopards. In his youth an old Roman fountain still played in the city square, a thing of erotic beauty with four stone naiads whose naked breasts gushed water.

"*Preciosa*," he said. "More beautiful than the moon." These naiads, though loved by all, were condemned at last by a bishop, and taken away and buried in the mountains.

"But you must see the mosaics in the Town Hall," he said. "Women and bulls. Gods and tigers. They also are *preciosa*."

So we went to the Town Hall with him, and there on the floor of the Council Chamber (once a convent, and before that a Roman villa) lay a mosaic of most voluptuous refinement. Across the neck of a prancing bull reclined a superb Europa, and around them paraded bearded gods, carrying whips and branches of green leaves. There were also nymphs, flowers, animals, and birds.

The floor was dusty, so a porter came and emptied a bucket of water over it. The colours of the mosaics sprang instantly alive, the nymphs shivered, the flowers opened, Europa seemed to draw in breath and arch her peach-fed body, and the bull's rich flanks steamed darkly.

"Ay!" said the porter, gazing down. "Behold that now. Some mornings I come in here, with my mind elsewhere, and I could swear a naked woman lies on the Council floor. I have wanted to cry out. It is like a miracle."

He sighed, and scratched himself under his smock, and departed, rattling his bucket against his thigh.

After luncheon we walked to the edge of the town to see the bullring. It stood in a circle of old white walls surrounded by tinkling goats. We knocked at a door in the wall and entered a small garden, where an old woman was cleaning a brass bedstead with sand.

She had a red face like a paper lantern which crumpled when she smiled at us. "Enter," she said. "Look about you, and I will send my sister."

We climbed some steps and pushed open a crumbling door and passed into the bullring. Big, empty, harsh, and haunted, for two thousand years this saucer of stone and sand had been dedicated to one purpose, and even in this naked daylight it still exuded a sharp mystery of blood.

The little bent sister arrived to show us round. She had no hair, was courteous and sad, and talked of the greatness of other times. We walked across the silent arena, now overgrown with grass. She showed us where the bulls were herded before battle, eight stalls of stone with heavy doors which could be raised in safety from above.

Here, once, came the greatest bulls of the Guadalquivir, and the greatest names fought them. All was decay and desertion now. The stalls were white with the droppings of birds; the door-pulleys were frayed and broken; a wrought-iron bull's head over the entrance wore a flaking skin of rust.

"In summer," said the old sister, "when it is possible, and if the agriculture is right, and if the campesinos have money—then we hold a corrida."

Her hairless eyes blinked about her with anxious pride, and the bright sun shone on the broken seats, the weeds and the grass, and on the sagging doorway to the pits through which the huge black bulls once made their thundering entrances.

"You should have come thirty years ago," she said. "How precious it was."

She talked with a faint whispering sadness, her head on one side, half smiling, remembering and listening to the time; hearing again the dead crowds roar on those electric afternoons; sitting once more in her Easter dress, the round flesh back on her shrunken bones, her cheeks flushed from a dedication. She was the shrivelled spirit of the place.

She fluttered her hands in sun and shadow. Here men and bulls had died before her eyes. And the flowers in summer were most beautiful to see. There, in that courtyard, they quartered the dead beasts—the best in Spain, the biggest and most barbarous. To that little room, she said, El Chico was carried, blood on his shirt, sweat on his long green face. In her comb and shawl she had run to the well, fetched water for him, and held his hand in his final panic. But he died.

Those summers were all hot dust and glory. Would the agriculture ever be right again? Would the farmers ever return from the hills, calling again for bulls? She shook her frail head and

wondered and locked the great door and took us back to the little garden. There she gave us two sweet oranges from a tree, and wished us good-bye. She would not accept a tip.

On our last night in Ecija came a message from the telephone exchange to say that the Superintendent had killed a pig and that we must go and help eat it. The Superintendent, an old friend now, was a lady of rare vitality who knew and could sing the whole of *The Fair Maid of Perth*. She had six nieces to help her with the telephones, and the exchange was a merry place, much given to gossip, card-playing, and long delays.

We arrived to find the telephone lines choked, and a great feast of pork, butter-cakes, and coñac spread out among the instruments. All the nieces were screechingly gay, except for the beautiful Lola, whose boy friend, a dentist, was late.

This boy was normally her greatest pride, for he was a youth of some versatility and could, it was claimed, speak English. This was true enough, in a way. But although his voice was perfectly normal when talking Spanish, he spoke English in a faint, high-pitched, tinny whine which was well-nigh indecipherable. This mystified me at first, until I discovered that he had learnt his English from an antique pre-1920 gramophone and could only be said to be suffering from too good an ear.

But this dentist was devoted to Lola, and spent most of the hours of courtship in his surgery gazing into her mouth. They thus enjoyed a unique, almost speechless intimacy. Yet tonight, when he arrived, Lola blazed with fire and fury and would have nothing to do with him. For a while he did card tricks, to try to curry favour, but no one took any notice.

Meanwhile the aunt entertained by dancing, dressing up, and singing down the telephones. But still Lola's great eyes glowered above the feast. The aunt wrung her hands in dismay and brought more pork, even photographs of her dead relations. Until the dentist, grown desperate at last, threw down his cards and produced from his pocket a plaster cast of Lola's teeth.

"Here you are," he said, blushing angrily. "I had meant to give it you for Christmas."

But all was now well. Everyone exclaimed with admiration, and Lola took his arm, laughing deep in her throat, and would not leave his side again for the rest of the evening.

Meanwhile, as the coñac warmed us, there was dancing in the patio, where the pig's corpse swung white in the moonlight. We danced till three; the nieces did the Sevillana; the aunt recited *The Siege of Saragossa*; the telephone lights twinkled unheeded; and we ate the whole side of the pig.

Next day we left in a horse and carriage, with pork chops in our hands. Paco, the hotel porter, gave us a parting present—a poem specially and laboriously written in red chalk capitals on the back of our bill. It combined tributes to Kati's beauty with, somehow, a lament on the death of Manolete. Then we rattled away through the cobbled streets to the shouts of the beggar children.

At the outskirts of Ecija we paused, briefly, to look back at the city. It lay in its little pool of sunlight, eternally gilded, eternally drowned. The ghostly bells called dryly to each other, and the ornate towers rose high above the clay like the stumps of once exotic flowers left from some ancient summer.

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CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

Man pops the question, but woman poses them. Ever since that female monster, the Sphinx, women have enjoyed enigmas, and men have maintained that they can read them like a book. Well, how many of these can you read? The answers, thirty in all, are on page 109.

1. *The stage is set, there is a dazzling cast—but their props are missing. Name the absent husbands: a. Jean Simmons b. Vivien Leigh c. Lilli Palmer d. Kay Hammond e. Audrey Hepburn f. Sybil Thorndike* (6)

2. *At an auction you buy an odd lot including a piano, a score of the opera, "Lakmé," a pair of riding-boots, a palette, a tutu, and a bound volume of Hansard for* 1954. *Which object would be the most suitable gift for each of the following: a. Laura Knight b. Beryl Grey c. Lily Pons d. Edith Summerskill e. Eileen Joyce f. Pat Smythe* (6)

3. *Adam and Eve, Romeo and Juliet, Abélard and Héloïse—not every couple makes such close harmony. How many of the missing partners can you supply for the following ladies of high degree: a. Madame de Pompadour b. Countess Walewska c. Madame Du Barry d. Mary, Queen of Scots* (6)

4. *Who were: a. the Blonde Bombshell b. the Swedish Nightingale c. the Swan of Lichfield d. the Lady with the Lamp e. the Serpent of old Nile f. the Rose without a Thorn* (6)

5. *What large (or lofty) ladies said: a. Life begins at forty b. Peel me a grape c. We are not amused* (3)

6. *Fill in the blanks in the following quotations:*
a. Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, 'Tis woman's — —
b. It's a woman's privilege to — — —
c. A woman's — is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs (3)

LEANDER FRAILEY

By JACK SCHAEFER

NEW CALYPSO was getting to be a real town when Baldpate Frailey settled there. It wasn't tucked away so far in a corner of Nebraska that you couldn't find it on a map if you looked hard enough. On a big map.

It bumped out with a fair quota of low buildings on each side of the railroad track, and twice a week a freight train stopped, and when the station-master sold a ticket, he could set the signals and one of the two-a-day, one-each-way passenger trains would squeal to a halt instead of chugging straight through.

The local farmers shipped there in the harvest season and the local cattlemen too, and supplies came in for the whole surrounding countryside.

Yes, New Calypso had grown to town-size when Baldpate Frailey stepped off the train with the tools of his trade in a black leather valise and set up shop in a squat, two-room shack between a saloon and a sprawling feedstore.

Baldpate was a barber. Maybe it was peculiar for a man without a hair on his own long, thin head to make a living out of other men's head-crops, but he was a fair-to-middling barber, who could trim your hair without nicking your ears and scrape away your stubble, leaving most of the skin intact.

His shop was on the wrong side of the tracks. Well, wrong side to some people. It was on the side with most of the saloons and the stockyard and the warehouse and the basket mill and the in-and-out squatters' shacks.

It wasn't on the side with the saloon that had upstairs rooms to rent and called itself a hotel, and the prosperous livery stable and the good retail stores and the solid respectable houses of the solid respectable townsfolk.

That side already had a barber's shop that had caught the fancy trade with its neatly painted pole outside and its big mirror behind the two chairs and its shiny brass spittoon that its proprietor called a cuspidor.

Baldpate started with a makeshift chair that he could raise and lower with a wooden lever. He finally acquired a real barber's chair second hand from Lincoln. He finally acquired a small mirror and a black-painted spittoon. But he couldn't compete with the other shop and he didn't try. He got the fringe trade, the men who worked on the same side of the tracks, and an occasional cowboy nursing his nickels, and railwaymen stopping off, and the squatters, who sometimes could pay and sometimes couldn't. He had to be content with that, and he was. He didn't ask much out of life.

When Baldpate stepped off the train, he wasn't alone. He had two boys with him, his sons, Leander and Greenberry. Leander was the elder, already stretching long and thin in body and head, with such a meagre, scraggly topknot of hair you could tell he wouldn't be wearing a man's pants long before he'd be bald as a bean. He took after his father.

Greenberry was a pair of years younger, considerably shorter but plumper, with a waving tangle of hair that would have made a fine big floor mop. He must have taken after his mother, who had quietly checked out of the Frailey family and the whole of this world some years before.

The three of them lived in the back room of the shop. Baldpate did the barbering and Leander did the housekeeping and Greenberry did nothing. Nothing except eat hearty, wander around town with other boys, and sit lazy in the sun, which was what he liked best after the eating.

Old Baldpate favoured Greenberry, maybe because of the mop of hair, and was always telling Leander to take care of him and watch out for him. So, naturally, it was Leander, not Greenberry, who began to be snapping the shears at the chair in the afternoons when Baldpate grew tired and felt the arthritis creeping into his joints.

And then, one night, about the time the boys had their full growth, Baldpate sat up in his bed in the dark and called across the little room, "Leander! You mind me now. You take care of your brother."

And old Baldpate lay back down and rolled his head on the pillow and died.

You can forget about Baldpate Frailey now. He's not important to this story. He brought the family to New Calypso, and started the family business, and told Leander what to do, and died, and that's enough said about him. It's Leander and Greenberry we're interested in.

Leander first. He was a good boy, quiet and steady, so

naturally, he became a good man, quiet and steady still. The only thing unusual about his growing stage was the stretch when he spent a lot of time drawing pictures with a thick pencil he'd found somewhere, on any scrap of paper that came to hand.

Nobody paid any attention to that. Nobody except Greenberry, who just looked and laughed and settled back to more lazing in the sun. But anyone who paid real attention might have noticed that Leander liked to draw heads, men's heads, with plenty of hair on them and sideburns and all kinds of moustaches and beards. Then he didn't have time for that because he was helping with the barbering as well as doing the housekeeping, and then his father was dead and he had full-time barbering to keep him busy.

He didn't need to draw heads after that. He had real ones to work with.

It wasn't long before folks on the wrong side of the tracks knew they had a prize barber there, who wouldn't be worrisome about being paid on the dot as long as they brought him heavy manes of hair or thick crops of whiskers to be sheared. They gave him plenty of practice, and by the time he had his techniques worked out, it was a treat to be barbered by that Leander.

He'd set you in that one chair and stand back and circle you slowly, studying your head from all round. Then he'd pick up the right tool and go to work. Sometimes it'd be the hand clippers. He could do a whole handsome haircut with those clippers alone. Sometimes it'd be the heavy shears or again the light scissors or an alternating of them. Whatever it was, there'd be a wonderful snipping rhythm soothing about your ears.

Leander had more than rhythm. He had positive melodies matching the work in hand. If your hair was coarse and strong, you'd hear a marching tune from the flying blades as the locks fell. If your hair was light and fluffy, you'd hear something like a delicate dance tune. His combing was right in time, and his soft old brush with the powder on it would be dusting dainty about your neck at the exact second the cut tag-ends of hair might be beginning to get itchy and threatening to slide down under your shirt.

And when he'd lower the chair back and lather your face and take the right razor out of old Baldpate's box that had one marked for each day in the week, then you knew you were in the hands of a master. His razors were always so sharp the toughest whiskers surrendered without a struggle. His strokes were so deft you weren't certain you felt them.

When he raised the chair back again and stepped away and

circled you again, you sat still and waited for the verdict. Maybe he'd shake his head and snatch up his scissors and make a fresh attack on your hair or moustache or beard or even eyebrows, and by that time, you'd not even think of interfering because you knew that when he was finished you'd look better than you ever did before.

Let him do it his way, and Leander could make anybody look like Somebody.

As good as his barbering, some people said, was the effect he had on his customers. He wasn't a talking barber and that marked him as different right away. He was usually so intent on the portrait he was making out of the raw material of features and hair and whiskers in his chair that he might not even hear you if you spoke to him.

But if you listened closely, you might hear him muttering to himself, not much and not often, just a few words now and then. " Interesting head to work on . . . Now these are eyebrows . . . No sense hiding that chin "—things like that.

No matter how low and picayune you felt, going into the shop, you had the feeling, coming out, that maybe the face you presented to the world had a point or two in its favour.

The first time the folks on the right side of the tracks began to have some notion what had been developing over on the other side was when Osgood R. Buxton, proprietor of the Big Bargain Mercantile Establishment and President of the New Calypso Bank, was stranded there with a half-hour to kill.

The day had started badly for him. All through breakfast his wife had complained again about the wide, drooping, moustache that had taken him years to cultivate into the kind of upper-lip canopy he thought impressive. " Makes you look like a seasick mastiff," she said, and was so delighted at her comparison that he stumped out madder than usual. Then he went down to the freight office to check the shipment he was expecting and found it wasn't in and the train would be half an hour late. He stumped up and down the unpaved street, kicking at the dust, and the unfairness of it all hit him so hard he decided to strike back in some drastic way.

Through the open door of Leander's shop he saw the barber's chair empty and stumped in and plonked himself down. He took hold of his moustache with both hands.

" Shave this damn thing off," he said.

Leander didn't pay any attention to the words. Leander was padding round him in a circle, studying his head from all sides.

Buxton slapped both the chair arms. " You hear me? " he shouted. " I said shave this damn biscuit-brush off me! "

Leander focused on him as someone speaking. "No," he said, "it belongs there."

Buxton subsided with a blowing gurgle that waggled the moustache. "Belongs there?"

"Yes," Leander said. "It just needs a little pointing so it won't fight with your forehead."

"Fight with my forehead?" Buxton said in a small voice. He relaxed in the chair, and a big piece of checked cloth covered him up to the neck and was tied behind, and a clipping rhythm began about his head, and something like a cheery marching tune tickled his ears.

When the cloth came off, he stood up and peered into the little mirror. His hair had been thinned along the sides so suddenly it seemed thicker on top. His eyebrows had acquired a faintly quizzical air. His moustache was almost the same, yet remarkably different. It had a slight upward twist, suggestive of jauntiness without being aggressive, and the side tips somehow pointed your glance upward to notice the broad forehead. The whole effect was that of a man who could do things in the world and was of consequence in his community.

When he walked out of the door, Buxton was snapping his knees in long strides, and though the train was another half-hour late, he spent the time chatting cheerfully with the station-master and trying to catch the light so that he could see his reflection in a window.

With a beginning like that and a booster like Buxton, only a few months were needed for Leander to have a steady clientele from the right side of the railroad track. There were those who remained faithful to the other shop and that was sensible because even Leander couldn't have kept the entire masculine population of New Calypso in trim. But he had all the trade he could handle, fancy and fringe, and it was all the same to him. A customer was a customer, regardless of where he lived or how full or empty his pocket. Leander would do as artistic a job on a stray tramp as on Osgood R. Buxton himself. He stayed right on in the same one-chair shop and made only the one change of buying a bigger mirror.

New Calypso became real proud of him, and Gus Hagelin, who ran the *New Calypsan Herald-Gazette*, ran items about his shop once in a while and kept notes on some of the stories about him, to be included some day in a history of the township.

You've probably never heard the one about the hair-cutting contest with Polkadot City's best entry. New Calypsans rarely talked about that one. Some of them got to blowing boastful over Polkadot City way about Leander's speed with the shears,

which was silly because speed with Leander was just a part of his skill and not a purpose in itself.

But, anyway, that started an argument and the upshot was that the New Calypsans bet that Leander could trim down two shaggy heads before the best barber Polkadot City could find could finish one. The bets were heavy before Leander heard about it. He didn't like it, but he couldn't let any of his regulars lose money on him by defaulting, so he said he'd take part in the race. They thought he ought to go into training, practise finger exercises and things like that, but he just said to tell him when, and went on with his regular barbering.

When they came for him on the day, he just picked up his clippers and a comb and dropped them in a pocket and went along. They had three men lined up on kitchen chairs and they were really shaggy-headed.

The other barber had a tray ready with half a dozen pairs of scissors laid out. Leander shrugged his shoulders and took out his own clippers and waited.

At the starting-gun the two of them went at it, and it was Leander's race all the way. While the other barber clacked his shears and tangled himself in the hair and nipped his own fingers in his hurry, Leander skimmed along, swift and sure, and a fine racing-fast jigtime tune played around the two heads he was working on, first one and then the other. There wasn't any wasted motion. Each cut was exact and true. He was carving out neat haircuts with his clippers like a sculptor chipping a statue.

He was going strong and about finished when the inevitable happened. He started muttering to himself. He had the two heads trimmed in a way that would have made any ordinary barber proud, when he stepped back and made a circuit of his two men and shook his head. He didn't even hear the shouting of his supporters, and he stepped close again and started the final little delicate, polishing strokes that would bring out the best-barbered points of those two men.

While the New Calypsans groaned, the other barber made a last jagged slice and claimed a finish, and considerable argument developed but the judges gave him the decision. And Leander wasn't even aware of the argument. He was quietly padding round his two subjects and nodding satisfiedly to himself.

The New Calypsans paid their bets, grumbling, and in time most of them conceded that Leander couldn't have done anything else and still been Leander, but they never talked much about that contest. They preferred telling stories like the one about the time the Governor was worried over re-election, and as a campaign stunt, came all the way to New Calypso for some of

Leander's barbering, and Leander touched him up so noble and convincing that he won with a thumping majority. But you've heard that one. Everybody has.

It's Greenberry's turn now. Just as Leander kept on the way he had started, growing longer and thinner and balder and more energetic, so Greenberry kept on the way he had started too, growing plumper so that he seemed shorter, and thicker-haired and lazier. He sprouted whiskers at a remarkably early age and they weren't sparse and blond like Leander's, which had to be shaved off because they were such poor specimens. No, Greenberry's whiskers were stout and dark and close-sprouting, and he showed prodigious power in producing them.

By the time he was old enough to vote, if he'd ever bother to do anything taking that much energy, he had the biggest, bushiest beard in New Calypso. And it kept right on growing. No razor—not even a pair of scissors—had ever touched the main body of it. The only clipping he gave it was a mere minor pruning around the mouth to keep the way clear for his frequent intake of food. It roamed round his face from ear to ear and down over his chest like a magnificent stand of undergrowth and merged above into his dark, waving crop of hair, so that his upper cheeks and eyes and forehead peeped out like someone hiding in a thicket.

Maybe he clung to that wondrous beard because he realized it represented his one real accomplishment. Some backbiting folks said he did it because he was mean and worthless and was trying to shame his brother and, in a figurative sense, thumb his nose at the very family business that enabled him to stay so plump and well-fed. That couldn't have been true. Greenberry Frailey wasn't mean. Maybe close to worthless. But not mean. He was just lazy. He was just trifling.

Matter of fact, he was as proud of Leander as anyone in New Calypso, and if arguing hadn't been too much trouble, he'd have been ready to argue with anyone that Leander was the best brother and the best barber in the country.

All the same, it was peculiar to see the most amazing crop of hair and whiskers anywhere in civilized captivity sitting day after day in the sun on the little porch of a barber's shop. That was what Greenberry did every day the sun shone. Nobody ever knew whether he would have tried to do any barbering if the shop had had another chair. Probably not, because Leander hinted about getting another one once and Greenberry promptly pointed out there wasn't room enough.

So Greenberry took over the chore of preparing meals, which was somewhat to his liking, and after breakfast he'd settle on the

porch till time for his mid-morning snack, and then settle again till time for lunch, and after that settle again till time for his mid-afternoon jaunt all the way next door to the neighbouring saloon. Just before this, he'd go into the shop and round Leander by the chair and pull open the money drawer under the scissors shelf and slip into his pocket one dollar, never any more and never any less. When that dollar was in the hands of the bar-tender he would come back for the evening meal.

If his taste had been for the good liquor at twenty-five cents a shot, he'd still be able to navigate among the dishes and play a fair game of backgammon with Leander after supper. If it had been for the cheap liquor at ten cents a shot, he'd likely soon be snoring on his bed and Leander would have to be the cook.

Those times Leander might begin to worry he wasn't doing right by his brother and shake him awake and try telling him he ought to get a job of some kind, and Greenberry would simply say, "Why? We're doing all right, aren't we?" and Leander wouldn't know what to say because they were.

There they were, Leander doing his barber's magic inside the shop and Greenberry raising whiskers on the porch, and they might have continued that way indefinitely if Leander hadn't acquired an obsession that started as a small notion and grew until it was so bad it could quiver in his fingertips.

He had all his regular patrons in the New Calypso territory well in hand, each fitted with the hair styles and whiskery facial adornments or lack of same that would make the emphatic most of their natural endowments. The task now was simply to keep them trimmed that way. There was no challenge left in them, no demand for fresh creative effort.

He welcomed with positive delight stray strangers who wandered in. But they were few and far between. He began to feel frustrated and barren of inspiration.

And then he stood on the little porch one afternoon and looked at Greenberry snoozing in the sun, and a breeze waggled the long ends of Greenberry's beard, and the small notion was born. By evening it was so big in him that he could hardly look at Greenberry across the supper table. During the next days it swelled to such proportions that it interfered with his barbering. He had to shake his head sharply to rid it of the image of that magnificent shock of raw material, and the rhythmic melody of his cutting would break as his fingers quivered on the clippers.

And then Greenberry, all unknowing, tripped the trigger of the trap awaiting him by taking ten shots of liquor and coming home and falling asleep.

Leander closed the shop door at five o'clock as usual and

padded into the back room and saw Greenberry gently snoring, and a sudden little tremor ran through him. He rocked on his feet a moment and closed his mouth with a sudden snap.

He padded into the shop and returned and laid out his tools on a chair by the bed, the clippers and the scissors, big and small, and a comb and the right razor and the brush and the soap mug. Carefully he raised Greenberry's shoulders with one arm and slipped two pillows behind him. Carefully he spread the checked cloth over Greenberry's plump middle and raised Greenberry's beard to slide the upper edge of the cloth under it.

For a long time he stood staring at the huge thatch of wondrous hair and whiskers, framed against the cloth and the top pillow. He was not studying the head, because he did not need to. He knew every possible configuration hidden inside that thicket, every feature that everyone else in New Calypso had long forgotten. He was tasting the sweet, tangy ecstasy of anticipation.

At last he carefully set another chair by the bedside and sat down on it and leaned forward. With a soft sigh of complete contentment he picked up the clippers and went to work.

Greenberry stirred once at a slight tugging on his chin, but a rich majestic melody of snipping blades was playing about his head, and it soothed him even deeper into slumber.

He woke late in the evening in the lamplight and was surprised that Leander had not roused him to supper. He was more surprised when he saw Leander limp on the other bed, asleep, and on his long, thin, bald-topped face the beatific smile of a man who has made a supreme effort and found it good. Greenberry heaved to his feet and was so befuddled he was not aware that he was a changed man. From sheer habit, he ate five big sandwiches, and did not notice the new freedom of access to his mouth and lay down again and slept once more.

He was still unaware in the morning despite the secretive, proud glances Leander gave him, and awareness did not touch him until he went out of the back door and took hold of the two-wheeled push-cart there and started off on his weekly food-shopping jaunt to Oscar Trittipoe's General Grocery Store.

He never reached the store. Not on that trip. He was accustomed to being ignored by most people passing, and that pleased him because it saved the energy of a return greeting. He was accustomed to having those who did speak make humorous references to his beard. But this time neither thing happened. Everyone noticed him. Very definitely.

They stared at him as if they had never seen him before, and turned to watch him go by. And no one spoke about his beard. No one spoke at all. Most of them nodded to him, respectful

and deferential, and some of the men involuntarily tipped their hats.

It was too much for Greenberry's somnolent mind to grasp all at once. He hurried back to the shop, went in, and turned to Leander, pottering at his instrument shelf, and, in turning, saw himself in the big mirror.

Not himself. Someone else. A man of amazingly impressive presence. A thick shock of hair tamed and disciplined to dignity, yet with the inherent vitality plain in every faultless wave. Strong eyebrows subtly arched to emphasize the width and nobility of the brow. A sturdy moustache, firm and short-cropped, speaking of confidence and self-assurance and somehow also pointing out the out-thrust power of the nose above. Rugged sideburns clipped close, yet with a faint flaring that suggested breadth of mind.

And a beard, deep under the chin and reliable, short but not too short, wide but not too wide, a solid foundation for the face, proclaiming serenity and wisdom with every sturdy hair.

Greenberry shook with the shock. He threw Leander one look of frenzied reproach and fairly ran into the back room and closed the door. He sat on the edge of his bed and leaned the superb portrait that was now his head forward into his plump hands and let the frightening knowledge that he was marked with distinction sweep over him.

It was characteristic that he never once thought that a few strokes with scissors could reduce him again to a scraggly nonentity. He would have had to make those scissor-strokes.

He sat motionless a long time. At last his head rose and he made a few exploratory motions with his hands around his chin and cheeks. He stood up and placed himself in front of the little mirror that had once served in the shop, and his mind was braced now for what he would see. He studied himself, turning his head sideways and rolling his eyes to catch the splendour from various angles. Unconsciously, he stood straighter and pulled in his bulging waistline and puffed out his chest.

By noon the new Greenberry Frailey, fortified with a full lunch, was ready to face the world.

The new Greenberry Frailey. That is precisely what he was. A new man. A changed man. In all outward semblance at least. The very first day, he discovered what his impressive appearance could accomplish in promoting prompt, actually scurrying service and the choicest cuts of meat from the formerly lackadaisical and almost contemptuous Oscar Trittipoe.

On the third day, he learnt the ease with which he could obtain

virtually unlimited credit at the Big Bargain Mercantile Establishment and forthwith arrayed himself in what was to be thereafter his unvarying uniform: black trousers and black frock-coat and gorgeous grey vest and white shirt, and celluloid collar and black-string bow-tie, unseen beneath that now disciplined, matchless beard except when he thrust his chin out and fluffed the beard up in a gesture calculated to draw attention to its perfect proportions.

By the end of the first week, he had even acquired a gold-headed cane and his voice had dropped several notes to a deepening resonance; and he was developing a flowing, almost courtly manner. By the end of the second week, he was settled in his new role, rapidly becoming another New Calypsan institution, a monumental figure seen every clear day on the centre bench between the town watering-trough and the town flagpole across from the post office.

You can assay the true measure of Leander's art when you understand that already the New Calypsans were forgetting the old Greenberry who had sat in his ancient red plaid shirt and split-seam dungarees on the porch of the little shop, and were drifting so completely under the spell of the new Greenberry that they accepted his benign nods as benedictions and felt that their town was a better place because such a towering testament to the dignity and nobility of the human race dwelt among them.

When he used to snooze on the porch, he had been a shiftless disgrace to be ignored. Now, when he drowsed on the bench, serene and nodding in the sun, he was a philosopher thinking deep thoughts and pondering grave problems and giving tone to the community. Why, it's a fact there was not even a noticeable chuckle when he began calling himself J. Greenberry Frailey.

It was Osgood R. Buxton himself who launched Greenberry on his public career. The time came when Buxton was a mite worried about the New Calypso Bank. More than a mite worried. The bank had overreached itself in granting loans, and the cattle market was wobbly and a lot of the loans might have to be carried over, and a few rumours got to skipping about, and Buxton was worried what would happen if a run started.

He sat at his desk by the bank's front window, worrying, and stroking the moustache Leander had saved for him, and through the window he noticed with a sudden, idea-prompted push the never-failing impressiveness of Greenberry on the bench. Five minutes and a brief talk later, Buxton was on his way to Gus Hagelin with an item for the *Herald-Gazette* to the effect that J. Greenberry Frailey had kindly consented to become a director of the New Calypso Bank.

The only immediate change for Greenberry was the addition

of ten dollars a month to his pocket and a slight shift of sitting-quarters, from the bench by the flagpole to a bench in front of the bank, where the sun was even better, and his presence was a steady reassurance to troubled depositors. The monthly meetings were no real chore. All he had to do was attend and sit quiet and murmur, " Hmmmm! " in a thoughtful tone when an important decision was being taken, and the directors would proceed exactly as they would have done without him, buttressed now with the feeling that they were being wise and judicious indeed.

But this first step into the realm of actual activity encouraged other people to draw him into other things. He discovered the lure of speech-making. The deep roll of his voice combined with the overpowering benignity of his appearance to produce a hypnotic effect on his audiences. The words were unimportant. It was the impression that prevailed. He auctioned the hampers of home-made delicacies at town dances and could obtain good prices for those prepared by the most unattractive unattached females. He presided at the annual Strawberry Festival and the Stockmen's Show and was the Fourth of July orator.

There was no doubt about it. With little real effort on his part he had become an unofficial public dignitary.

And Leander? Well, Leander was content. He had done what old Baldpate told him to do. He had taken care of Greenberry in the most important way and what remained of the taking-care was merely a matter of helping to maintain Greenberry in the style to which he had become accustomed.

That was simple, because Greenberry was not active enough to wear out clothes rapidly, and ate, if anything, less than before, and his drinks were almost invariably supplied by admirers, more than willing to pay for the privilege.

Leander now had constantly before him the inspiration of his finest masterpiece, the one perfect portrait that he never tired of retouching and keeping in perfect trim. And Greenberry, in his way, was properly grateful. His innocent trust that Leander would take care of him had been justified in a surprising and superlative degree.

He never failed, when extolling the glories of New Calypso in his occasional orations, to include some mention of the tonsorial wizardry of that far-famed prince among barbers, my brother Leander. He continued to grace the little shop building with his presence as his eating- and sleeping-quarters. He continued to spend his spare evenings playing backgammon with Leander. So complete was his hold on the town that many people regarded this as somewhat of a condescension on his part.

Yes, Leander had worked out a way of life for himself and

Greenberry that satisfied them both and was a double-weight asset to New Calypso.

Then enter the serpent, Worthington P. C. Stimmel. That was the name in Old English lettering on his calling-cards, and he carried his cards in a cardcase. They also stated, in smaller but no less compelling type, that he was President and Corresponding Secretary, the Amalgamated Association for the Betterment of American Communities.

This Stimmel had long since made an interesting discovery. He had learnt that when towns attained some size, they found themselves needing such modern improvements as sewers and cobblestone pavements and those ingenious means of public transportation, horse-cars. He had discovered that sometimes the people of an ambitious small town could be persuaded that the process would work in reverse, that if they would sell bonds to themselves to raise the funds and draw plans for new streets and install sewers and pavements and horse-cars, then their own town would automatically attract newcomers and grow swiftly and become boomingly prosperous.

It was unfortunate that the promotional expenses and the cost of this Stimmel's invaluable services always exhausted most if not all of the funds raised. But by the time the townsfolk learnt that in full, eye-opening force, this Stimmel would be far away, planning the improvement of another community in another part of the country.

A man of Worthington P. C. Stimmel's experienced discernment could see at once the splendid future that awaited New Calypso. He could recognize with equal facility the unusual opportunity offered by J. Greenberry Frailey's bewhiskered magnificence.

He had not been in New Calypso ten days before stationery was printed and bonds were being engraved, and both stationery and bonds proclaimed the fact that J. Greenberry Frailey was Chairman of the New Calypso Citizens' League of Progress, the latest chapter of the A.A.B.A.C.

There was some opposition, led by Oscar Trittipoe, who was by nature an obstinate individual, and Gus Hagelin, who had acquired from his newspaper work a suspicious trend of mind and some knowledge of human frailties. But obstinacy and suspicion could not prevail against the majesty of the Greenberry whiskers. The N.C.C.L.P. gained momentum like an avalanche moving, and the date was set for the public meeting that would launch the sale of bonds.

All this bothered Leander not at all. He never interfered in Greenberry's doings. His own doubts about the League project

were overwhelmed by Greenberry's contagious optimism. To him the thought of a bigger and more booming New Calypso was pleasant because that might mean new and unfamiliar customers. He went quietly on with his barbering.

And then Worthington P. C. Stimmel made a mistake. Operating on the principle of when in Rome do as the Romans do, he went into the little barber's shop for a trim.

"Heard about you from your brother," this Stimmel said in his best patronizing manner.

There was no reply. Leander was circling the chair, studying him from all sides. The first eager small smile on Leander's face was fading into a tight-lipped frown.

Mutton-chop whiskers. Leander had never liked mutton-chop whiskers and refused to permit them on any regular customer. They were not right for any decent human head. They could have only one purpose, to hide or draw attention away from other things. Correct. These mutton-chops gave a broadness and solidity to this head that was not really there. They obscured the whole sinister, greedy, calculating cast of the countenance.

Leander picked up his big scissors, and they hovered about Stimmel's head, and the rhythmic tune they played in their first warming-up skirmishes in the air was a stern and resolute one. But they never touched a hair or whisker. Leander stopped and laid them down. He could not do it. He picked up the small scissors and, for the first time since he was a boy relieving old Baldpate in the afternoons, he gave an ordinary haircut, merely trimming into neatness the original portrait presented to him.

That was all that happened then in the shop. But afterwards Leander did what he had never done before. He closed the shop during working-hours and went to see Gus Hagelin, and what he learnt there added more worry to what he had learnt in the shop. He tried to talk to several League members, and they laughed and told him to stick to his barbering, and he tried to talk to Greenberry that evening, and Greenberry laughed too, and at last grew huffy and said he'd move to a room at the hotel if Leander didn't stop harping on something he knew nothing about.

So Leander kept his worry to himself, and it grew till it was a new obsession with him. He kept remembering what old Baldpate had said and realizing that Greenberry was in this slick Stimmel scheme and in a sense the kingpin of it, the asset that could push it through. And so, at last, when he had worried himself thinner and time was drawing short, he did something else he had never done before.

On the day before the public meeting, he went to the saloon next door and bought a bottle of the cheap liquor and had it on

the table when he played backgammon with Greenberry that evening. He poured more into Greenberry's glass whenever that was empty, and his own slick scheme succeeded. By eleven o'clock Greenberry was snoring soundly on his bed.

Leander padded forward into the shop and returned and laid out his tools on a chair and spread the checked cloth over Greenberry's chest. For a long time he stood staring down at the finest portrait he had ever achieved. With a soft sigh of torment, he picked up his clippers, and a slow, sad melody of snipping blades began to play around Greenberry's head.

Greenberry slept straight through the night and well into the morning. He woke slowly and then focused suddenly on the old clock on a shelf. Five minutes past ten. The meeting had begun five minutes ago and he was not there. No time even for breakfast, and that was a drastic thing to happen to him. He shrugged into his frock-coat as quickly as he could and grabbed his gold-headed cane and hurried out through the shop past Leander, sitting mournfully in his own barber's chair.

He hurried out of the front door, disregarding Leander's calling to him, and hurried up the street and across the tracks to the crowded space behind the flagpole, where a bandstand had been erected and the four-piece New Calypso Band was seated and Worthington P. C. Stimmel was standing erect, delivering his practised sales talk.

There on the stand, this Stimmel, speaking against time, saw with relief the magnificent wavy shock of Greenberry's hair moving towards him through the assembled people. He shifted smoothly into remarks introducing that almost legendary repository of wisdom and civic foresight, that peerless pillar of New Calypsan community life, J. Greenberry Frailey, and waved to the approaching pillar to ascend the stand.

And Greenberry burst out of the crowd and went up the steps and took his dignified stance and thrust his head forward a bit and reached up, in the strange hushed silence that had gripped the whole scene, to fluff his beard.

It was that gesture that released the first of the sniggering chuckles into loud and contagious guffaws. Greenberry's hand came up in the familiar movement to fluff his beard, and there was no beard for him to fluff. There was only what the New Calypsans had long ago forgotten, the ridiculous small and round, little-boyish, dimpled chin that the beard had hidden.

As the laughter rolled around the flagpole and New Calypsans thumped each other on the back, Worthington P. C. Stimmel, that man of experienced discernment, slipped down from the

stand and away, and Gus Hagelin, that man aware of human frailties, leapt up on the stand and shouted at the band, and raucous music began to blare.

And through the midst of the overall merriment came a long and thin and bald-headed figure, stoop-shouldered and sad and ashamed, to take care of his brother and lead him home.

All the rest of the day, the little shop was closed. The next day, it was open and time had gone backwards. A plump figure in a red plaid shirt and split-seam dungarees sat on the porch in the sun. Inside there were no more snipping melodies. There was only the pedestrian plodding of routine cutting.

Greenberry sat in the sun and, some of the time, actually snoozed, and Leander went on with his barbering, but it was an ordinary barber's barbering. He had used his art to destroy and not to create, and the magic was gone from his fingers.

In mid afternoon Greenberry rose and went into the shop and pulled open the money drawer and took out a dollar and reached and took another and looked at Leander, patiently working his scissors in dull routine, and put the second dollar back and plodded out. It was a ten-shot session for him in the saloon and he returned, barely able to navigate, and lay down on his bed and in a few moments was sleeping, and almost anyone, seeing him there, would have said that was all he was doing.

But he was doing something else. All unawares, he was doing the one thing that he could do better than anyone else in New Calypso. Leander saw it when he came into the back room from the shop. He saw what he, a barber, had actually forgotten. He saw the dark stubble emerging on Greenberry's chin and remembered Greenberry's prodigious talent for raising whiskers.

His eyes brightened and small rhythmic melodies began to stir again in his finger muscles. He had not failed old Baldpate. Not yet. He could try again and, if necessary, again. It would not take long, not with Greenberry so obligingly concentrating, even in his sleep, on his one wondrous accomplishment.

Already Leander could begin to see the next portrait. Not dignity and thoughtfulness and deep wisdom this time. No. A portrait built around a short, stubby, square-cut beard, the beard of a man steady and dependable and competent at whatever work he might have in hand.

★ ★ ★

My moustaches are for me my receiving aerial which draws impressions and inspirations from the outside world.

SALVADOR DALI

THE MASK

by Storm Jameson

A versatile author who has gained distinction in many fields of writing, Storm Jameson is perhaps best known for her novels. Like her most recent one, "The Hidden River," many of these have a French setting, and it is to the South of France, to Nice in early spring, that the author returns in this new story, setting her moving and compassionate study of love against the colour and gaiety of its famous Carnaval.

THE sun had less warmth than it should have had in mid February in Nice: it was dulled by a thin cloud which spread like a cold breath, darkening the sea, tarnishing the black evergreens and livid rocks of the hills.

Hurrying across the wide square on his way home to lunch, Biancherie thought: How disappointed he will be if it rains to-morrow. The whole face of the square was masked by the figures, enormous, flat, highly coloured, of a child's picture-book; they had been fixed there for days, in readiness for the first procession of the Carnaval.

This year for the first time, his son, Michel, had been expecting it. Last year and the year before he had simply accepted it when it came along, as a day no odder than other days. But between four years and five is an immense gap. Suddenly, from being a baby, Michel had become a little boy who knew what Carnaval meant and was restlessly excited by the idea that tomorrow, masked and in fancy dress, he would be running about the square on the margin of the procession, making it rain confetti.

Biancherie's apartment was the top floor of a strong, shabby house near the port; to reach it he had to climb eight flights of dark stone stairs, but once there, he had all the light and sun there was—in summer, too much. The apartment had been his uncle's. He inherited it when he had inherited the small chemist's shop which brought him in a moderately sufficient income.

He had not expected to inherit so soon; he had been fond of his uncle and a little grieved by his sudden death, but after all, it is pleasant to become at twenty-two your own master, to marry, and bring your wife into a comfortable, well-furnished home, its cupboards stocked with linen sheets and lace quilts and curtains, rugs on the polished boards, and in the larger bedroom a bed of great age, dignity, magnificence.

He could still see Lucile, in her white dress, walking soberly from room to room, opening the doors of cupboards, in silence—so that he had no idea whether she were pleased or not—until she threw open the long window of the sitting-room and stepped on to the narrow balcony with its iron railing and few straggling geraniums in pots. Then she gave a cry of pleasure, and called him. " Jeannot, Jeannot, come and stand here, you can see the end of the port and a line of sea."

He came and stood beside her, dazzled by the nearly intolerable brightness of the light, and choked, suffocated by his love.

He let himself into the apartment. As he opened the door, Michel rushed out of the kitchen and hurled himself at his father's legs. He was wearing long, tight, black-and-white-checked trousers, a short velvet jacket, buckled slippers, and a small hat with a long scarlet quill.

Biancherie picked him up, rubbed his cheek against the child's hot, soft, round face, and asked, " What's this? "

" For tomorrow," the child cried, " for tomorrow. And we've bought my mask."

" Show me," said Biancherie. He set the child down, and watched him run along the narrow passage to his bedroom, then went into the kitchen. It was warm with the smells of cooking, fennel, oil, nutmeg.

His wife, setting bowls and glasses on the table, looked at him with a smile. " He would try the things on," she said.

Standing near her, he laid a finger on her hair, black and gleaming, very carefully arranged, and smelling of the scented oil she used; her body had its own scent, a good vegetable smell, strong and pleasant.

At thirty-one, Lucile Biancherie was almost as slender as when he married her; she was twenty-five then, three years older than he was; his mother, who had opposed the marriage, said, " In five years she'll be as round and broad as a casserole."

It was a false prophecy. Except that her arms had become fuller, she had not changed; her skin was still so smooth and supple that it was more like a finely spun tissue than human skin, her eyes, dark, immense, under black arched eyebrows, were clear and calm, their thick lids uncreased. She had given Michel everything of herself except these eyes.

The child had his father's eyes, smaller, pale, with all Biancherie's look of patience and goodness: for the rest, he was his mother, with her smoothly rounded knees and wide shoulders, fine straight nose, and in his armpits and all the curves and hollows of his small

body the same strong, clean scent, of ripe figs, musk, olives, new bread. He had, too, his mother's passionate temper, changing in an instant from grief to happiness, from blissful tenderness to a moment of violent rage. Only a moment. Like his mother again, he had a warmly loving heart.

Not once in the six years of their marriage had Biancherie regretted marrying a young woman without a penny to her name or a decent dress to her back.

He seated himself at the table. "What is the child supposed to be?"

"Why, a little English boy, of course," cried his wife. "Didn't you look at him?"

"Yes, of course, I wasn't thinking," he excused himself. "And his mask?"

"I haven't seen it yet. He went out this morning, with old Madame Titine, and they bought it. A lion or a clown, or some sort of grotesque."

Michel ran into the room, wearing the mask. It was neither grotesque nor animal; it was simply the face of a silly, vapid young man, tiny black moustache, weak chin, turned-up nose. Biancherie disliked it at once, but until his wife burst out laughing he did not realize why.

"But it's you, Jeannot," she stammered, hardly able to get the words out, "it's exactly you . . . Did you know it was like Daddy?" she asked the little boy.

"That's why I chose it," said Michel, pleased. Pulling the mask off, he kissed it tenderly, then climbed onto his father's knee, put both arms round his neck, and kissed him with the same warm love.

Biancherie barely responded. He was shocked, a little dazed, hurt. Did they really, Lucile and his son, see in him that fatuous booby? He poured a little wine into his glass and took an unsteady drink. Abruptly his wife realized that he was hurt. She came round the table to him and pressed his head against her body, roughening his hair.

"Don't spoil Michel's pleasure in his mask," she said softly. "He chose it because he loves you and thinks you're the best-looking man in the world. Just as I do."

"But if that's what I'm like—" he began.

"You're not!" Lucile said warmly. "It's like a child's drawing of you, it's not you at all—not really."

She caressed his face with her short fingers, then bent, and kissed him, leaving on his lips the taste of the olive oil she always poured into her soup before she began to drink it, and the scent, at once heavy and sharp, from her hair.

Reassured, he ate his lunch with appetite, but when, before going out, he went into their bedroom, he stood for a full minute in front of the looking-glass, scrutinizing his face. Do I look like it, he asked himself. True, his chin was nothing much of a chin, and the black circumflex of moustache drawn halfway between his nose

and his small mouth was identical with that on the mask, but surely, surely, there the likeness ceased?

For less than a second his head swam, his eyes seemed to look back at him from the glass through slits, like Michel's eyes looking through the slits in the mask. He pulled himself together and saw the face he was familiar with, not handsome, certainly, but not vacant and conceited, an amiable, gentle, candid face, his face.

As he turned from the glass, Lucile came into the room; picking up his scarf and overcoat he kissed her and went off.

The sky was less veiled, less opaque, as if the sun were getting the better of the cloud, and as he hurried through narrow streets of flat-faced houses and small shops, he felt happy, almost exhilarated. The street he was just leaving smelt of fish, and the next of anchovies and sawdust; a smell of wine came through the open door of a little café, and from a narrow, dark court the stench of drains and some strong animal scent. Through an alley between houses he was blinded by the light from the sea, shot at him along a thin, cold breeze.

When he reached the pharmacy, old Angeli, who had been his uncle's assistant and was now his, and more highly qualified than either of them—but he could not help drinking; every evening, from nine o'clock onwards, he was drunk, as drunk as a thrush—had unlocked the door and was waiting for him inside, his face dark with news.

"You're wanted at your mother's," he said in his hoarse voice. "She's dying. They've just telephoned from the Red Cross. You're to go up there at once."

The news was not unexpected, yet it startled him, as if something in his body had been squeezed and twisted. He decided, although he had more than twenty-five miles to go, to take a taxi from the garage near his house; he hurried back there, told Lucile, who cried warmly, "Oh, poor old thing," promised to get a message to her in the morning, and went off.

A feeling of suspense, which was neither anxiety nor grief, but confused both, kept him leaning forward tensely in the cab, his mind strained towards the village he would reach, with luck, in two hours. It was a terrific climb, and they had given him an old, wheezing car; he felt a little vexed that he had not taken one of the cars waiting to be hired by tourists. But, long before they left the outskirts of Nice and began to climb into the hills, he had ceased to strain forward and was already in, yes, in the village.

Lucile always said that this place where they had both been born and brought up had become unreal to her, a dream, and not a very pleasant one. With him, it was just the opposite.

He had only to think of it, it had only to come uninvited into his head, for Nice—even old Nice where he lived, its houses vibrating with life like wasps' nests, its odorous, noisy streets—to become shadowy and colourless, and at once, even without willing it, as if he had no will at all in the matter, he was crossing

the small, dusty square in scorching sun, his feet burnt through the thin soles of his sandals by the iron-hard earth, his eyelids fluttering in the light; or walking, stumbling over loose stones, avoiding the moving, buzzing patch of flies, down the path to his mother's house: not a single street in this village where less than two hundred souls lived had been made, they were all tracks, of dry, pale dust in summer, of mud in winter before the snow came and after it melted.

Even sometimes on first waking, before he stretched out a hand and touched Lucile, lying warm and insensible beside him, or in the moment before he came fully awake, he was in that other room, between bare walls he could touch on both sides without moving from his slip of a bed, staring at the barred window high in the wall.

But not high enough to discourage any of the local tribe of lean yellow cats from jumping, when the fancy seized it, into the recess, to sit there squinting down at him through the single pane. Once, afraid, he had knocked on the wall to summon his mother. She came in and stared fixedly at the beast in silence until it jumped down out of sight; after this once, he was for some reason reluctant to call her in again, and he let the cats be.

The house had only two rooms, his and the one where his mother slept, and cooked behind a screen. Here they sat in the evenings, he bent over his lessons under the single oil lamp, she upright, hands folded, eyes fixed, not in a glance, however distant, but in a total absence, as if she had separated herself, withdrawn, once and for all, from every object and every creature surrounding her.

Next door to this almost hovel—except that she kept it scrupulously clean—was the house, the big dignified house where he had been born and lived until an evening in his fifth year. That evening he came home from spending the day with his foster-mother, lower down the steep street, to find the great front door locked and sealed, and his mother waiting for him in the doorway of their new home.

As a child does, he had accepted the change without misgiving, with only a momentary surprise. His father was not there. Once after this he asked for him, and she said violently, " He has gone."

He never asked again. Years later he learnt what had happened. His father had been away for some days, one of his habitual absences, from which he came back smiling and humming, with some absurdity he had picked off the shelf of a toyshop. That morning, as soon as his mother had dispatched him to Madame Gabano, she had sent to Vence for the notary, her old friend, and ordered him to fix seals on the house—which was her own—and inform her husband that this time it would be no use his returning, it was finished, she had done with him. Let him stay with *his other wife*. Distressed, the notary had remonstrated with her. In the end, convinced that she was behaving in this way because she had reached a place where there was nothing else she could do, he did as she told him. Her husband made no attempt to come back or to see her; his son did not even know whether he were still alive.

The great house remained shut up, with all its furniture in place,

except for the few pieces his mother had had carried into their two-roomed cottage. She never set foot in it again. If she caught her son staring too long at the heavy moulded door as he passed it, the glance she sent him from the solitude at the back of her eyes was like the flash of a lizard across a rock. He took care not to risk it.

Now and then, driven only by curiosity, he walked down the street and turned sharp back along the even rougher track running parallel with it lower down the hill. At this side, because of the steep drop of the hill, the house had six storeys, and he could look up at the shuttered windows and struggle to remember what the rooms behind them were like: he was so young when they left it that he remembered almost nothing. Sometimes, very rarely, in sleep, he found himself in an immense, shadowy room, at once familiar and elusive, as if, rising round him from the depths of his infancy, it was sinking back into them before he could seize it.

He was not unhappy, living with his nearly silent mother in their two rooms. Not only was he by nature gay and confident, but he had always (like his father, he thought now) his other home, in Madame Gabano's warm, dark kitchen, below the little café with its strong smell of red coarse wine and garlic. The window, on the precipice side of the house, overlooked a descending pattern of hills folding one into another, separated by ravines, down, down, to the level of the sea drawn out there in a thin, tense, gleaming arc.

Here he had a family, a real family, with outbursts of laughter, scoldings, tears, cupboard doors slammed shut to keep the contents from tumbling into the room; in one corner a dusty pile of potatoes down which, as a very small child, he rolled; in another corner Pierre Gabano's bed, Pierre his foster-brother—his friend, Pierre.

Four years older than he was, Pierre, at nine, was not a child: broad-shouldered, with a high colour in his dark cheeks, large strong hands, feet of which every toe moved as easily as a finger, and magnificent eyes, so thickly fringed by long black eyelashes that they appeared to take up even more space than they did in his wide face. He was short in body, but very strong, very gentle.

Jean Biancherie followed at his heels like a young dog, waiting for the caress he was certain before long to get. Pierre at this time was his mother: it was with Pierre he had all his experience of the tenderness of a mother, more than with Madame Gabano, and more, infinitely more, than with his own mother, who caressed him so seldom that he was always surprised to feel her hand on his cheek for a second.

For three or four years after the day his mother sealed the house, Pierre was the whole of his family. Then, with the reckless generosity for which she was known—behind her narrow forehead and bird's eyes was a compassion as warm as a stove—Madame Gabano adopted the daughter of neighbours who had died suddenly.

Lucile Grassi was twelve. He remembered her coming into the kitchen when he was there, in her black ugly dress, too stuffy for the day, her eyes reddened, her lips thick and as if bruised

with crying. Pierre was not at home. Madame Gabano had to go upstairs, and he was left alone with her. She sat down in the corner on Pierre's bed, and took no notice of his few shy words.

After a time, because he did not know what else to do, he began to reel about the room like a clown, hoping to make her laugh. He was a good clown, able to send his foster-mother and Pierre into fits of laughter by his antics. And, strange to recall, she did laugh. She laughed, then cried a little, and a minute later dropped suddenly asleep, falling back on the bed as if something in her had given way.

He was afraid to budge, for fear of wakening her. He stood and stared. She lay with one arm over the side of the bed. He saw the fingers of this hand, small, dimpled, plump, slowly uncurl until it lay on the floor like the soft paw of a little animal. A few drops of sweat came out along her upper lip; he noticed the hair pressed damply against her neck.

Holding his breath, he went down on one knee, and kissed, timidly, gently, her arm and then her knees through the musty, evil-smelling dress.

I must, he thought, have begun to love her in that moment, without knowing it. She returned his love. For her years, she was childish, and they played together as if they were of an age, rolling about the floor under Pierre's amused eye. Sometimes, between the warmth of the kitchen and their exertions, they rolled into each other and fell asleep; then Pierre picked them up like puppies and dropped them on his bed: he was only a year older than Lucile, but at this time, at thirteen, he was already almost a young man. If Lucile woke first, she roused Jean by a shower of little kisses, like a bird pecking him, or like the rapid, meaningless kisses of a very young child.

In the same level of memory as this, so that it must, he thought, have happened the same year, when he was nine, he placed an evening which was the most extraordinary, the most mysterious of his life. It began in his foster-mother's kitchen; he was alone there, trying to read in the light from the single pane of glass sunk in the wall. She came in, with another woman. He paid no attention to them, and only after a time, warned by an instinct, did he realize that the person they were talking about in lowered voices was his mother.

Then, without raising his head, he listened. He knew already that his mother was looked on in the village with disapproval, because she had ceased to go to Mass. But the respect, an involuntary respect, paid her by everyone, man, woman, child, muted this disapproval to a whisper or a glance exchanged between two women as she passed them in the long, full-skirted coat she wore, winter and summer, over anything else she put on.

" She is unhappy," said his foster-mother.

" Then she should have submitted herself. She had her health, her comforts. Why should she be unhappy? "

His foster-mother sighed. " You think there is only one sort of unhappiness? "

" I know only one sort," said the other.

" Well," said Madame Gabano, " I am an ignorant woman—no more ignorant than you—and I don't understand these things. I don't know whether she is wicked, whether she is sinning, or not. Only God understands these things. I leave it to Him."

A little later, when he went home, he found the priest there. It was August, and hot, killingly hot. All day long the air had been thick with heat: it clung to the eyes, under the eyelids, to the back of the neck. Except for a few flies there was not a creature in the street.

Inside the darkened room, the shutters closed, Father Leydet allowed the sweat to trickle over his face and down the folds of his neck, and wiped it away only when drops rolled into his eyes. After the priest had greeted him, Jean looked at his mother to see whether she wanted him to go and sit in his even hotter room: she signed to him to sit down here and keep quiet. Thankfully, he drew a stool into the corner and laid his head against the whitewashed stone wall. After a moment, Father Leydet went on talking, and the boy understood almost at once that he had come, not for the first time, to reprove her for her absence from church.

" You are not required," he said, " to have an opinion, or to judge whosoever it may be, even yourself. All that is required of you is to love."

" Love? Love whom? " his mother asked distantly.

" God."

His mother moved her shoulders. " How do you expect me to love someone I have never seen? Impossible. I'm not made like that. I can, if you like, respect, fear, but love—no."

" That," said the priest, " is a foolish form of words. I am astonished that you should sink your intelligence—you are, alas, intelligent—to such a level."

The movement of his mother's head reminded Jean of a hawk in the second when it drops; the nostrils of her strongly beaked nose palpitated slightly and rapidly.

" If you would have the kindness to tell me, Father, which god you are talking about. The one who made this world? "

" Certainly He made the world," said Father Leydet. " He made it, and for that reason, if for no other, it is to be loved."

" I am to love—you ask me to love—the disease which tortures a child to death, the cruelties men practise on each other with so much ingenuity and pleasure, the murders by which we live, and can live no other way—you and I as much as the wolf closing his fangs in the flesh of a terrified sheep? "

" Our Lord did not say: Understand. He said: Love."

" Then I should be loving what is purely evil," said his mother. " I won't do it."

There was a silence. Father Leydet lifted his hand as if to wipe his face, let it drop, and said in a low voice, " This evil spirit in

you, my daughter, is one I know only since I have lived here, in this place. God forgive me, but sometimes I believe it comes from the earth itself of these hills "—he lifted his eyes, as if he could see, through the houses on the other side of the narrow street, the livid, corroded hills round and behind the village, burnt to the bone, dry—" as if it has been left here, an old root, always waiting for a chance to push its way up through some living human being. And evil, evil."

" That's exactly what I said," answered his mother.

Going down on his knees, Father Leydet prayed for a few minutes, then left.

Jean looked at his mother diffidently. " What did he mean? "

" Go to bed," said his mother.

It was too hot to sleep. He lay on his bed in his nightshirt, the sheet pushed to one side, and watched the thread of sky, all he could see through his window, turn from geranium to green to dove-colour to deep violet. After this, he must have dozed, because when he felt his mother's hand on his shoulder, he started up.

She shook him a little. " Get up."

Stumbling out of bed, he asked, " What? "

" Put your shoes on. Take this cape."

She gave him the cape he wore to school in the winter and watched him fumble it round his shoulders. In the darkness, he could only see that she was wearing her long coat over her night-gown. She took his hand and led him out of the house.

Outside, all was darkness and silence, so silent that as they walked together up the street towards the square he heard the little groan made by a sleeper behind one of the shutters and a muttered, unconscious word. A cat streaked across under his feet, coming from some crevice full of delicious ordures. When they reached the square, he looked up at the sky; it was entirely dark, only a few very distant stars.

" Where are we going? "

His mother did not answer. She let go of his hand and quickened her step, so that he had all he could do to keep up with her. There were no houses beyond the square; from here the road turned down towards the valley to the right, and left into the hills. She took the left-hand turn.

After only a short distance, the track became steeper and stonier. He glanced over his shoulder. The village, below them, was already hidden by a flank of the nearest hill. He had become used to the darkness and he could see the stones and dry, pale dust under his feet, and the savage skeletons of hills bristling round him. Beyond, were mountains sunk in the night.

Every few minutes a breath of scent, dry, spicy, came out of the darkness, and once he heard something, a snake or a large lizard, slither under the bush they had just passed. He began to be tired, and dragged his feet.

How long, how far did they climb? He had no idea, nor was he

ever able, later, to say with certainty: It was here. When at last his mother stopped and drew him with her off the path and across the dry, crackling heath, he was half asleep; the stones tripped him up, the spines of rosemary and gorse caught at and tore his bare legs, and at one moment he stepped on something soft, the only softness in this fierce country. It seemed to spread under his feet. He shuddered.

They were standing in a cleft in the ground; on either side were rocks and behind them a tall peak flying off into the darkness. The air was warm, heavy. He had the impression that his mother had not really known where she was going, and had stopped here out of weariness, or at some obscure bidding.

He himself was dying of sleep, asleep on his feet. After a time, she began talking, but her words moved in and out of his sleep like birds; now a whole sentence brushed him, now only a single word.

" I wanted you and I had you. But where you came from who knows? You're not like anyone in my family, nor even in *his* . . . Lost . . . This world is purely evil. It was made by a devil . . . That fool, with his talk of mortal sin. There is only one unforgivable sin. And do you know what that is? Giving birth . . . You ought not to have been born."

" What have I done? " he asked.

" Nothing," said his mother. " You have done nothing, you."

Seized by fear, he cried out, " No, don't! Don't hurt me."

" All the harm I could do you, I've already done," she said. " I should thank the devil if you were to die, but I can't kill you. I'm not honest enough."

He was shaking with terror. But it was not she who terrified him, nor anything she had said. The terror flowing into him was rising from the ground, from the phantoms of hills. He begged her to turn back.

After this he must have rocked off to sleep, because when he became conscious, they were walking along the track again, on their way home. An opaque milky light had spread across the sky. He turned his head and saw the rays of the sun striking across the most distant hills. It was as if the light came out of the hills. Every stone and scattered bush near him quivered in the first—it would also be the last—cool breath of day.

He was not of an age to put into words, even for himself, his certainty that there was nothing more beautiful in the world than this entirely naked land, but it turned his heart.

He stumbled.

" Come," said his mother. She had noticed his glance. " You admire this, do you? "

" Yes."

" It's only a lie," she said violently, " a counterfeit, a mask. Nothing more than a mask."

He did not remember reaching the house, nor if he got into bed by himself or if she put him there. In the morning he would have

supposed a nightmare, but for his school cape lying on the floor, and the long scratches down his legs covered with grey dust.

The car was grinding now up the last mile of the road. Seen from below, the village clinging to the knife-point of the hill, its roofs masking the higher peaks behind, was a crumbling heap of walls the yellow colour of ivory. On this side, the houses seemed only to prolong for thirty or forty feet the naked hill, which dropped sheerly below them until it became a gentler but still precipitous slope, scarred by derelict terraces from the time, half a century ago, when eight hundred people lived here and grew olives. Now the only olive trees were his mother's. A month ago, when they were being picked, not one of the pickers was a young man or a girl.

The car stopped in the square; the driver refused to attempt the street leading out of it.

Empty in winter sunlight, the square received him and pushed him gently down the stony dust of the street, between houses, half of them empty, the rest, he felt, all eyes behind the curtains drawn across the windows.

Is she still alive, he wondered. He pushed open the door . . .

Madame Gabano stood up at the side of the bed, balancing from side to side her sparrow's head, thrusting her wrinkled lips forward in a smile. " You're here. Good."

He bent over his mother, lying in the centre of the bed, the blankets drawn under her chin.

" Is she asleep? "

" No, poor lady—unconscious." She sighed. " Now you've come, I can go home and see to things a little. I'll come back."

" What is there to do for her? " he asked, uneasy.

" Nothing, my poor Jeannot. There's nothing."

Alone, he brought his face close to the face lying there, inert, like a fragment of old brown, lightly polished wood, the eyelids a darker brown than the rest, and sunken as if there were nothing under them, as if what had been an absence of looking had become an absence at last of her eyes themselves.

" I'm here," he said, " I'm here with you. This is Jean, your son Jean."

There was no flicker of recognition in the dark face: below the forehead, scored across and across by irregular black lines, her beaked nose stood out like a little scimitar. Biancherie rubbed his own. You could at least have given me that, he reflected.

He took the chair by the bed, and sat down to wait. Wait for what? Once or twice he spoke to her again. His words fell into a silence so profound that he felt the absurdity of them.

Yet was she any farther from him, any more absent, than she had always been?

It was growing dark when Madame Gabano came back. She told him that a meal was waiting for him in her kitchen. He went off, ate, drank part of the bottle of wine, and returned.

" How long will this go on? " he asked.

" A day. Two days. Or a few hours. I've made your bed for you in your room. Go and sleep. I'll sit up."

He told her, " No, Mamma, no need for that. I'll watch her tonight. Tomorrow, if it's necessary, you can take a turn. Tonight, no. Leave her to me."

She fussed round him, seeing that there was enough oil in the night-light placed in a corner of the room on the floor, that he had a rug handy if he felt cold, and at last, quite glad to go, went.

It was an interminable night. When the last footsteps had gone past the house and all was quiet outside, he would certainly, if he had been more comfortable, have dropped asleep. He thought of Lucile, asleep now in the wide bed in their room, of his mother's refusal to see her or acknowledge her as a daughter-in-law, of her contempt for the young woman as a nothing, the daughter of two nothings. Double zero, she called her.

He believed that it was this contempt, made harshly plain to her, which had driven Lucile to refuse, for more than two long years, to marry him. The first time he asked her, when he was nineteen and she twenty-two, she had refused gently; after that, her rejections became sharper, more impatient, more irritable. She suffered, he thought, from that cruel *double zero*.

The day she agreed was a day such as this had been, but earlier in the year. January. He was already in Nice, with his uncle, coming home only at the weekend. He had been helping to pick the olives; towards four o'clock, exhausted, he gave it up and came home. He left Pierre there, still hard at work.

Pierre had become, for her trees and indeed for all her small affairs, Madame Biancherie's right hand. Not that she paid him a penny above his labourer's wage. It did not occur either to Pierre or his mother to complain.

When he was almost at the village, he saw that a young woman was still bending over the long stone trough at the end of the street, wringing the sheets she had been washing. It was Lucile. She had nearly finished, she told him. He waited, and walked with her to Madame Gabano's, carrying the damp bundle. She forced herself to be gay, to chatter to him, but she was tired.

In the kitchen she held out her hands, purple with cold, the finger-ends wrinkled. Half smiling, half bitter, she said, " They'll soon be like everyone else's—pads, not hands."

He caught hold of them. " When you marry me, you'll be living in Nice, with no need to ruin your hands to wash sheets."

She laughed at him, mocking and gentle. " What could I do in Nice? They would make fun of me."

" Who? "

" People like your mother," she said.

" No one is like my mother. Not anywhere. No one would laugh at you, at my wife. Everyone without exception would look at you with respect, you're so calm, so beautiful, you would be like a princess there."

She turned away from him. " I'm too old for you. I'm three years older than you, my dear Jeannot."

His heart beating violently, he made an unsteady move towards her: he realized that she was going to give in to him. " Nonsense," he said, with difficulty. " You are only a child—my child. I was born older than you, much older."

She let him take her in his arms. There were tears on her eyelids, but she was smiling. She pressed her face against his shoulder, so that he drew in when he breathed the smell of her hair; it was strong and pleasant, rougher than it was now, the good smell of a growing plant. He kissed the side of her neck: though she did not return his kisses, she tightened her hold of him and he felt her tremble.

Neither of them had heard Pierre come down the stairs in his canvas sandals. The first sound they heard was his indrawn breath.

Lucile freed herself and wheeled round. " Jeannot and I are going to be married," she said.

" She has agreed. At last." He waited for Pierre to smile, to throw both arms round him and kiss him, and kiss Lucile.

Pierre did not move. " Is it true? " he asked Lucile.

" Yes, of course."

" Why? "

" What do you mean, why? " said Biancherie. " We've always loved each other, I'm of age, I have money of my own, why shouldn't we get married? "

" Your mother," said Pierre.

Oh, if that were all. " My mother will agree to what she can't prevent any longer."

" D'you think so? " said Pierre. " That isn't my idea of Madame Biancherie. She has never in her life agreed to what vexes her. Coming from God or the devil. Still less chance when it only comes from you."

" Why are you talking like this? " he asked.

" He is surprised," said Lucile quietly. She spoke to Pierre, looking at him. " How can I go on living here—with nothing—with hardly a pair of stockings to my name? And nothing to look forward to except hard work, poverty, wrinkles? Think, Pierre."

" Yes," he answered.

There was a silence. Pierre lifted his head and looked from one to the other: he smiled. Laying an arm round Biancherie, he kissed him on both cheeks.

" You'll be happy. Lucile will be kind to you."

Biancherie laughed. " You haven't asked me to be kind to Lucile."

" No need," said Pierre, " you couldn't help it. You can't help being kind."

" Who could, to Lucile? " he said, smiling.

" Who could, to Lucile? " echoed Pierre.

It was after their marriage, not long after, as if it had unsettled

him, that Pierre himself went off to become a sailor. His mother, Madame Biancherie, the whole village were stupefied. The sea, after all!

But he enjoyed his new life. The first thing he did at the end of a voyage, even before going home to stay with his mother, was to climb the eight flights of stairs to see his foster-brother and Lucile, bringing them whatever had caught his eye in Valparaiso or Puerto-Bueno, a piece of silk, a fan, a nest of carved painted boxes. These visits, too short, were gay, gayer than the Carnaval.

The shadows flying up and out from the night-light merged into one shadow. Hanging forward in his chair, he fell asleep. He woke with a jerk of his body, certain he had heard her speak or make some movement. Lifting the light, he bent over her. Her eyes were open, but all he saw under their lids was the shadow which had devoured them.

His hand shook, and he set the light down. " Mother. This is me. Jeannot."

He did not dare touch her. Her face had kept its look of hard indifference.

His watch had stopped, but at this moment he heard a man going to work passing the house, and knew it must be daylight. Noiselessly, he opened the shutter: light came into the room. When he turned to look at her, she had closed her eyes again.

Madame Gabano came and sent him to drink the coffee she had made and left at the side of the stove. Later, about ten, the doctor arrived, looked at her, listened to her heart, lifted an eyelid.

" Another twenty-four hours," he said. " She's strong."

" Poor lady," said Madame Gabano.

" She feels nothing," said the doctor.

" Can you be sure? "

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He had other patients in the village, and went off. Biancherie hurried out. He telephoned to Angeli at the pharmacy to tell him what the doctor had said, and ordered him to let Lucile know at once that he would be staying up here another night.

He went back to the house. As he opened the door, his foster-mother turned round from the bed, slowly and as if reluctantly. " Your mother is dead."

An hour or so later, when the doctor was leaving the house for the second time, Madame Gabano said, " My poor Jeannot, you must go out for a time, and leave me with her. Put it at two hours. What will you do? Walk a little? Go home? "

By home, as he knew, she meant her own kitchen. Obeying a sudden impulse, he asked the doctor, " Are you going back now to Vence? "

" No. To Nice, to the hospital."

" Will you run me down there? I can see my wife for a few minutes, and come straight back."

" Certainly."

He wanted the warmth of Lucile's body against his own for a moment, a solace, a remedy against the mortal cold he had felt flowing round him, which had set his teeth chattering. All would be well if, for only a moment, he could rest his cheek below her throat, and feel her hand press it there closely. The complete security she gave him with this one gesture was so exquisite that each time it happened he thought the same thing in the same words: She is giving me my soul.

Nothing else she did for him equalled this gift of security. So gentle, so simple, so beyond any gratitude. He had always, when he put his arms round her, and when, turning the light off, he came to lie beside her in their bed, the same sensation of warmth and safety he had felt as a child when he stepped into his foster-mother's kitchen and closed the door on everything that chilled and puzzled him.

The doctor dropped him in the centre of Nice. It was two hours before the Carnaval would start, but already excited children were running about the square in any sort of cheap, pinned-together disguise. He smiled, remembered Michel's mask, and in an involuntary annoyance, frowned.

He let himself into the apartment without a sound. Michel, he knew, would be sleeping, or at least lying on his bed pretending to sleep. " No sleep, no Carnaval," his mother would have told him.

There were no sounds of life but, to his surprise, he saw that three people had had lunch in the kitchen. The table was still covered with their plates and glasses. Who? a neighbour? The door of the sitting-room was open, and he could see across it to the balcony.

Lucile was out there, with Pierre. They stood, so closely embraced, Lucile's body as if moulded into Pierre's, his mouth closed on hers, that the only movement possible was that of Pierre's hands, passing in a series of light touches up her body as far as the shoulders. When they reached her shoulders she pressed her head back, with an expression of anguish on her face, her lips parted, showing the line of her teeth, her eyes wide open.

This expression, more than anything, stupefied Biancherie. He had never seen anything like it on her face. But how could I, he thought dully, how could I? She never felt like that for me.

Without another thought, and without making a sound, he crept back along the passage to the door, opened it noiselessly, and went away.

For a long time he walked about the streets, with a harassed, rapid step, as though in search of something. He was not thinking. When, without meaning to, he came back towards the square, it was filled with people, in the grand stands, along every pavement. The monstrous grotesques of the Carnaval were jigging round in the sun, under a torrent of music brayed by the loudspeakers.

Suddenly, not very far from him in the crowd on the pavement,

he saw the three of them, Lucile, Pierre, laughing, with Michel straddling his broad shoulders.

The child was wearing his mask, and now for the first time Biancherie felt rage opening in him, like a horrible wound. No doubt Lucile had lied; it was she who had chosen the mask and taught his son to laugh at him.

For a searing moment he confounded her and the child in one spasm of hatred. Michel put his hand up, pushed the mask off his face, and instantly became his good little Michel, impulsive, warm-hearted, loving. The hatred devouring Biancherie turned against his wife and Pierre; if it had touched them they would be dead.

Afraid of being seen, he turned and pushed his way through the crowd, and went by back streets to the pharmacy. The idea of killing them persisted in him: his meagre body had become a block of anger. A phrase repeated itself in his mind incessantly: " Double zero, double zero."

If he could rub out this double zero, make it the nothing it had always, except in his infatuated head, been, what a relief. What became of him afterwards was completely unimportant.

There were three people in the pharmacy. Angeli, after sending him a commiserating, inquisitive glance, went on serving them. Biancherie smiled vaguely. Going into the room at the back, he helped himself to enough gardenal to kill four or five people.

Angeli came in. " I wasn't expecting to see you, I thought—"

" My mother is dead," he interrupted.

He felt his knees giving way, and sat down, broken, in the only chair. He shut his eyes, until he felt the edge of a glass against his lips.

" Drink this up."

He drank it, and felt his strength and senses return. " Thanks," he said, " but I'm all right."

" It's quite a shock when they go," said Angeli. " You should go home now and let your wife put you to bed for a day."

" No, I must go back up there."

" Yes, yes, to watch. But you could rest for a few hours."

" Perhaps."

He left and went back to the apartment. There, the remains of lunch had been cleared away, except for a nearly full bottle of the rough wine Pierre liked. No doubt they meant to finish it at supper. He did not look inside the bedroom, his and Lucile's. Instead, he busied himself dissolving the gardenal in the wine, then sat down to wait.

As they came in at the door, he would jump up, cry, " Pierre! What luck! When did you get here? " And run to the cupboard for glasses. Pretending to drink, he would watch, watch until, not sure what was happening to them, stupefied, their limbs heavy, first one and then the other slid to the floor.

In all this, he had forgotten Michel. When, abruptly, he thought of him, the image which jumped into his mind was of Michel as

a six-months-old baby. He had been as old as that before Pierre—away on a long voyage, lasting a year—saw him. How gently he had lifted him out of his cradle! Gently, but with more assurance than the child's father had yet learnt towards him. He held him on one arm, Michel's head fitting neatly into the hollow of his shoulder.

"He's exactly his mother," he said.

"Yes, isn't he!"

At this instant Michel opened his eyes and looked directly at the dark rosy face above his. Smiling, Pierre traced with his finger a line round these widely open eyes.

"But he has your eyes, Jeannot, your good, kind eyes. Let's hope he has your kind heart as well."

"If he has as much goodness and kindness as Lucile, that's all I want," he answered.

Astonishing both men, Lucile burst into a violent fit of tears. "No, no," she stammered, "no, I'm not good. It is you, Jeannot, you."

At the time he had put it down to nerves, the nervous over-excitement of a young woman with her first baby. She had recovered quickly, and the evening, Michel safely asleep, had been one of delicious happiness and gaiety, with bursts of laughter when Pierre brought out, one by one, the wildly unsuitable presents he had thought of for the child, things Michel had not grown to even yet.

When, he wondered, did it begin?

As if it had been waiting all these years for the moment to show itself, a scene came back to him from the past, from his twelfth year. He was in the kitchen with Lucile and his foster-brother; it was late evening, nearly ten o'clock, and still very warm. It had been a hot, heavy day. They were all three silent.

Lucile, at once restless and languid, moved about the room, and Pierre—Pierre, the young man of sixteen, with the line of black feathery hairs along his upper lip and running down from his temples below his chin—watched her. From upstairs, from the little café, came the sound of voices, and a melancholy snatch of song.

"Jeannot, your mother will be angry if you don't go home," said his foster-brother.

He knew it, but did not move. In some inexplicable way he felt uneasy, reluctant to go, and at a loss. Like a child who, without knowing why, knows he is in the way, he sank himself in his sense of awkwardness.

Suddenly, Pierre stood up and walked across the room to where Lucile was leaning, her head thrown back, against the one window of the kitchen. Stooping, he rubbed his handsome dark face against hers, and passed his mouth lightly over her forehead, her eyes, her gleaming hair. These caresses were not different from others the boy had seen him give her, yet there was a difference. Lucile did not move. Bending lower, Pierre made the infantile

gesture of pressing his nose against the breasts scarcely outlined under her cotton dress.

She lifted her hands suddenly and pushed him away. Turning, she looked at the boy. " Go home to bed."

The roughness, the impatience of her voice startled him out of his inertia. He went.

They had begun to make love, he thought now. Or that, perhaps, was the evening they began.

Closing his eyes, he let rise behind them scenes he had *not* witnessed, images thrown up by his jealousy and rage: Pierre taking the girl's head between his hands, drawing it towards him, his mouth seeking her hair or her eyes, Pierre pressing this head against his throat, Pierre lying back, for a moment passive, under the pressure of her young mouth.

But suddenly, scattering these images, flinging them aside, there rose in him a jet of pure grief. It was without force or heat, yet seemed to tear him apart. She has always been so kind, he thought. And Pierre is so kind.

A ridiculous memory seized him: the day when, a very little boy, he forgot himself, and Pierre whipped off his knickers, washed him, washed the knickers, dried them on the stove, and had them back on him before Madame Gabano came downstairs again from the café where she had been busy for an hour serving the men on their way home from the fields.

The memory of this incident filled him with love. His heart turned over in him. Never, he had never felt for his foster-brother such a swelling wave of love and tenderness. It swept him to a point where he felt, about both of them, his wife and Pierre, that they were younger and weaker than he was. It was almost a maternal feeling, astonishing and frightening.

How I spoilt things for them, he thought. Not only that night. How, with my money, my assured future, I turned Lucile away from her contentment as the wife of a man who could give her none of the things I have given her, with whom she would have been poor, hard-worked, prematurely old, but—in a word—filled.

He felt a sharp compassion for her, pure love, pure tenderness.

The sooner I take myself out of their way the better, he told himself calmly. He stood up. Shaking the bottle of wine as if it were a medicine bottle, he measured out half of it into a large tumbler, poured the rest away down the sink, and carried the tumbler into the bedroom. He noticed that the bed had not been slept in.

If it is true, he thought, that men are evil, creatures of the devil who made this world, all the more reason to pity them. An infinite pity.

He drank all the bitter wine, and lay down.

Almost at once, the drug effaced everything from his mind except vague images. He stood, remote from himself, between the phantoms of hills and the rocks and savage herbs, closer to him in the darkness. There was someone with him, indistinct, a face eaten

away by shadow, eyes seeking, through these hills and through the wide landscape of olive trees, dry river-beds, sea, the landscape of hell. He was not unhappy, and not afraid.

With a last flicker of thought, he knew that he had been drawn back into a time, a place, as old as the hills. At the last, at the very last, on the other side of thought, he was aware of people near him, dark-skinned, solid men, with the arms, the bodies, the voices, the happiness, the rage, the despair, the solitude, the courage, that had come to an end in him, their last, loneliest point.

The door was flung open by Michel. He danced into the room, wearing his silly little mask. Capering round the bed, he cried, "Look at me, look at me! I'm you now. I'm me and you. Do look."

Since there was no answer from the bed, he pouted and ran back into the kitchen, shouting that his father had come back and was asleep.

★ ★ ★

THE DISCRIMINATING READER

Beside the guest-room bed I find,
  Placed on a table neatly,
The books my thoughtful host consigned
  To care for me completely:

A tome on migratory birds,
  A treatise on the weather,
A thing on life among the Kurds,
  The *Rubáiyát* in leather;

A Baedeker for Southern France,
  A book for boys by Henty,
A novel that I read, by chance,
  Along in 1920.

A college text in chemistry,
  The Latin odes of Horace,
The Prayers of Bertram Blank, D.D.,
  An early Kathleen Norris.

And while I thumb through Eddie Guest
  And blow the dust off Schiller,
What of my host? Propped on his chest
  He holds the latest thriller.

RICHARD ARMOUR

FUN of the FAIR

If it could only just be like this for ever and ever amen. August Monday all over the earth.

DYLAN THOMAS

Imagine yourself in an extremely dense crowd, which swings you to and fro, and in and out, and every way but the right one; add to this the screams of women, the shouts of boys, the clanging of gongs, the firing of pistols, the ringing of bells, the bellowing of speaking-trumpets, the squeaking of penny dittoes, the noise of a dozen bands, with three drums in each, the hallooing of showmen, and an occasional roar from the wild-beast shows; and you are in the very centre and heart of the fair.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Sketches by Boz*

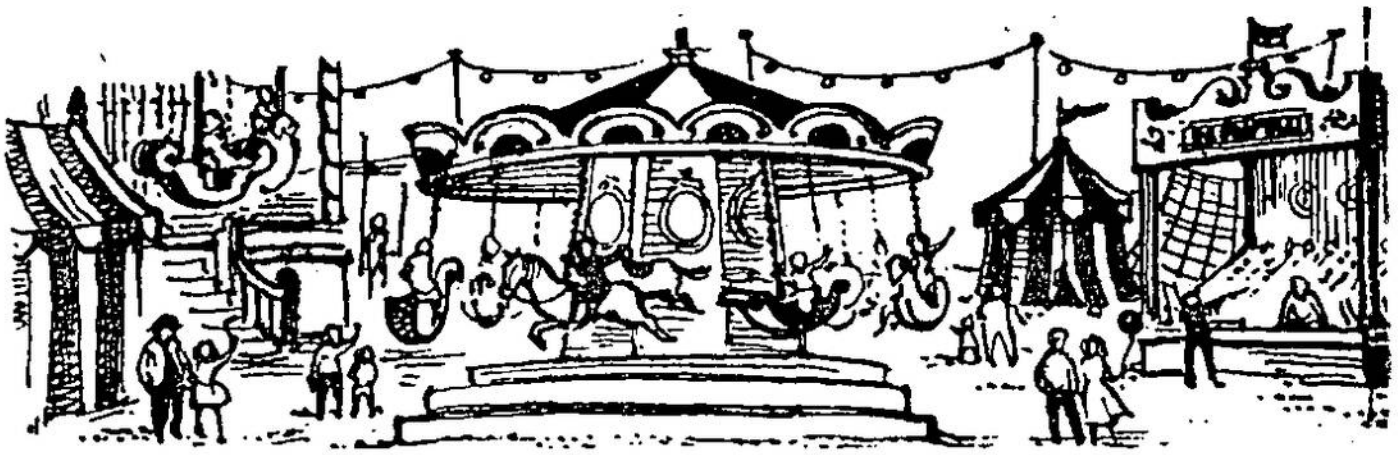
Going Up

"Oh, Fred, tell 'em to stop!"
That was the cry of Maria.
But the more she yelled "Whoa!" he said, "Let her go!"
And the swing went a little bit higher . . .

Fair Girl

But Gulley only laughed and carried me off to the Noah's Ark, which was the fastest of all the roundabouts. It nearly shook my clothes off. So when we were coming home up the village street arm in arm, it seemed to us both that the world was not big enough for our joys. Gulley kept on laughing and squeezing me and calling me his fair girl, and my head was so full of lights and faces, and the quiet boats and the sky, and my flesh was so full of the dust and the warmth and the beer and the shaking, that I was like another person in my own dream.

JOYCE CARY, *Herself Surprised*



Hare's Magic

Then we'll go by the long barrows,
And dip over the down,
To leap slap up the middle of the market-place,
Where the worthies are drinking beer,
And holding a fair,
In the country town.
It was quiet till we came, but with us
Comes a great wind blowing there.

Fast she'll go, so we'll flash
Past the pumpkins grown for the mayor;
And booths where the jolly onions grin;
And the topknot turnips stare;
Past the clear, twisted barley-sugars
Growing tame in glass jars,
But airy and the same as the wild canes grow
Under the African stars
By the alligator noses on the Congo;
Past the sweets like small satin pillows;
And the wind-blown smelly calico,
The flying wallpapers of willows,
The little booths of jewels,
Those tiny compartments of rubies,
Those sapphires like Indian air,
And the trays heaped with locks and metals,
And the lost keys, leading where?
And that circle of eternal horror,
Where rides a nurse on a dragon in a limbo,
While the green bananas dangle,
As the colt makes faces at the mare;
While the gypsy in coral and bangle
Dilates on the merits of the ancient mangle,
And the young bloods miss at the cardboard hare . . .

DOROTHY WELLESLEY

Young Blade

A few years back, on a raw evening of sleet and slush, I was passing a pawnshop and my eye was caught by something in the window. I went inside. The "uncle" put down his tabloid painfully and looked up to see what I had brought in. But I only said, "How much for that knife in the window?"

He shrugged. "A couple gross knives in the window, he asks how much." I described it and his eyes brightened. He fished the implement out with a hooked stick and laid it on the counter as if it were a treasure. "Make me an offer."

"Half a buck, take it or leave it."

"Sold! On one condition—you tell me *what in the hell* this thing is for! Six years, seven years maybe, it's a mystery. For cutting it's no good—it ain't sharp. For poking holes—*pfui*, it ain't enough pointed. Now you tell me what it is."

"That," I said, picking it up and demonstrating in pantomime, "is a carnival knife-thrower's knife." I went on to describe the act. His face was blank with wonder. "So it stands up against a wall his *wife*?" He shook his head slowly and kept shaking it. "Tschk, tschk, tschk! His *wife.* And from this a human being makes a living!"

WILLIAM L. GRESHAM, *Monster Midway*

Merry-Go-Round

Brightly coloured for a new season—
Black, sorrel, white, and dappled—
Awaiting their first riders, the horses
Pose in motionless flight, hoofs up,
The glossy reins looped to poles,
The embossed saddles, the chrome stirrups
Catching the glint of morning sun.

Soon the motor will start, the music begin,
Playing a medley from another season,
And the horses, neither gaining nor falling back,
Go galloping in circles of time,
Heads thrust forward, manes flying,
Carrying us giddily away and over
The bright, green terraces of summer.

OLIVER JENKINS

Strawberry Window

By Ray Bradbury

IN his dream, he was shutting the front door with its strawberry windows and lemon windows and windows like white clouds and windows like clear water in a country stream. Two dozen panes squared round the one big pane, the colour of fruit wines and jellies and cool water ices.

He remembered his father holding him up as a child.

"Look!"

And through the green glass the world was emerald, moss, and summer mint.

"Look!"

The lilac pane made dark grapes of all the passers-by.

And at last the strawberry glass perpetually bathed the town in roseate warmth, carpeted the world in pink sunrise, and made the cut lawn seem imported from some Persian rug bazaar. The strawberry window, best of all, cured people of their paleness, warmed the cold rain, and set the blowing, shifting February snows afire.

"Ah!"

He awoke.

He heard his boys talking before he was fully out of his dream and he lay in the dark now, listening to the sad sound their talk made, like the wind blowing the white sea-bottoms into the blue hills; and then he remembered.

We're on Mars, he thought.

"What?" His wife cried out in her sleep.

He hadn't realized he had spoken; he lay as still as he possibly could. But now, with a strange kind of numb reality, he saw his wife rise to haunt the room, her pale face staring through the small, high windows of their hut at the clear but unfamiliar stars.

"Carrie," he whispered.

She did not hear.

"Carrie," he whispered, "there's something I want to tell

you. For a month now I've been wanting to say . . . tomorrow . . . tomorrow morning, there's going to be . . ."

But his wife sat all to herself in the blue starlight and would not look at him.

He closed his eyes, tight.

If only the sun stayed up, he thought, if only there was no night. For during the day, he nailed the settlement town together, the boys were in school, and Carrie had cleaning, gardening, cooking to do.

But when the sun was gone and their hands were empty of flowers or hammers and nails and arithmetics, their memories, like night birds, came home in the dark. You heard them rustle the black roof like the first rain of a new season of endless rains. You woke to the cool pattering, which was not rain, but only the slow dipping down, the flicking, brushing, touching, the whispered flight and glide of remembering, towards dawn.

His wife moved, a slight turn of her head. "Will," she said at last, "I want to go home."

"Carrie."

"This isn't home," she said.

He saw that her eyes were wet and brimming. "Carrie. Hold on awhile."

"I've got no finger-nails from holding on now!"

As if she still moved in her sleep, she opened her chest of drawers and took out layers of handkerchiefs, shirts, undercloth-ing and put it all on top of the chest, not seeing it, letting her fingers touch and bring it out and put it down. The routine was long familiar now.

She would talk and put things out and stand quietly awhile, and then later put all the things away and come, dry-faced, back to bed and dreams. He was afraid that some night she would empty every drawer, and reach for the few ancient suitcases against the wall.

"Will . . ." Her voice was not bitter, but soft, featureless, and as uncoloured as the moonlight that showed what she was doing. "So many nights for six months I've talked this way; I'm ashamed. You work hard building houses in town. A man who works so hard shouldn't have to listen to a wife gone sad on him. But there's nothing to do but talk it out.

"It's the little things I miss most of all. I don't know—silly things. Our front-porch swing. The wicker rocking-chair, summer nights. Looking at the people walk or ride by those evenings, back in Ohio. Our black upright piano, out of tune. My Swedish cut glass. Our parlour furniture—oh, it was like a herd of elephants, I know, and all of it old. And the Chinese hanging

crystals that hit when the wind blew. And talking to neighbours there, on the front porch, July nights.

"All those crazy, silly things . . . they're not important. But it seems those are things that come to mind around three in the morning. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said. "Mars is a far place. It smells strange, looks strange, and feels strange. I think to myself nights, too. We came from a nice town."

"It was green," she said. "In the spring and summer. And yellow and red in the autumn. And ours was a fine house; my, it was old.

"Used to hear the house talking at night, whispering away. All the dry wood, the banisters, the front porch, the sills. Wherever you touched, it talked to you. Every room a different way. And when you had the whole house talking, it was a family around you in the dark, putting you to sleep. No other house, the kind they build nowadays, can be the same. A lot of people have got to live in a house to make it mellow down all over.

"This place here, now, this hut, it doesn't know I'm in it, doesn't care if I live or die. It makes a noise like tin, and tin's cold. It's got no pores for the years to sink in. It's got no cellar for you to put things away for next year and the year after that. It's got no attic where you keep things from last year and all the other years before you were born; and without an attic, you've got no past.

"If we only had a little bit up here that was familiar, Will, then we could make room for all that's strange. But when everything here, *every single thing* is strange, then it takes for ever to make things familiar."

He nodded in the dark. "There's nothing you say that I haven't thought."

She was looking at the moonlight where it lay upon the suitcases against the wall. He saw her move her hand down towards them.

"Carrie!"

"What?"

He swung his legs out of bed. "Carrie, I've done a crazy thing. All these months I heard you dreaming away, scared, and the boys at night, and the wind, and Mars out there, the sea-bottoms and all, and . . ."

He stopped and swallowed.

"You've got to understand what I did and why I did it. All the money we had in the bank a month ago, all the money we saved for ten years, I spent."

"Will!"

" I threw it away, Carrie, I swear, I threw it away on nothing. It was going to be a surprise. But now, tonight, there you are, and there are those damned suitcases on the floor and . . ."

" Will," she said, turning round, " you mean we've gone through all *this*, on Mars, putting away extra money every week, only to have you burn it up in a few hours? "

" I don't know," he said. " I'm a crazy fool. Look, it's not long till morning. We'll get up early. I'll take you down to see what I've done. I don't want to tell you, I want you to see. And if it's no go then, well, there's always those suitcases and the rocket to Earth four times a week."

She did not move.

" Will, Will," she murmured.

" Don't say any more," he said.

" Will, Will . . ." She shook her head slowly, unbelievingly.

He turned away and lay back down on his own side of the bed, and she sat on the other side, and for a moment did not lie down but only sat looking at the bureau where her handkerchiefs and jewellery and clothing lay ready in neat stacks where she had left them. Outside, a wind the colour of moonlight stirred up the sleeping dust and powdered the air.

At last she lay back, but said nothing more and was a cold weight in the bed, staring down the long tunnel of night towards the faintest sign of morning.

They got up in the very first light, and moved in the small hut without a sound. It was a pantomime prolonged almost to the time when someone might scream at the silence, as the mother and father and the boys washed and dressed and ate a quiet breakfast of toast and fruit juice and coffee, with no one looking directly at anyone and everyone watching someone in the reflecting surfaces of toaster, glass-ware, or cutlery, where all their faces were melted out of shape and made terribly alien in the early hour.

Then, at last, they opened the door and let in the air that blew across the cold, blue-white Martian seas, where only the sand tides dissolved and shifted and made ghost patterns, and they stepped out under a raw and staring cold sky and began their walk towards a town which seemed no more than a motion picture set far on ahead of them on a vast, empty stage.

" What part of town are we going to? " asked Carrie.

" The rocket depot," he said. " But before we get there, I've a lot to say."

The boys slowed down and moved behind their parents, listening. The father gazed ahead, and not once in all the time he was

talking did he look at his wife or sons to see how they were taking all that he said.

"I believe in Mars," he began, quietly. "I guess I believe some day it'll belong to us. We'll nail it down. We'll settle in. We won't turn tail and run. It came to me one day a year ago, right after we first arrived. Why did we come, I asked myself. Because, I said, because. It's the same thing with the salmon every year. The salmon don't know why they go where they go, but they go, anyway. Up rivers they don't remember, up streams, jumping waterfalls, but finally making it to where they propagate and die, and the whole thing starts again. Call it racial memory, instinct, call it nothing, but there it is. And here we are."

They walked in the silent morning with the great sky watching them and the strange blue and steam-white sands sifting about their feet on the new highway.

"So here we are. And from Mars, where? Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto, and on out? Right. *And on out.* Why? Some day the sun will blow up like a leaky furnace. Boom—there goes Earth. But maybe Mars won't be hurt. Or if Mars is hurt, maybe Pluto won't be, or if Pluto's hurt, then where'll *we* be, our sons' sons, that is?"

He gazed steadily up into that flawless shell of plum-coloured sky. "Why, we'll be on some world with a number maybe; planet 6 of star system 97, planet 2 of system 99! So damn far off from here you need a nightmare to take it in! We'll be gone, do you see, gone off away and safe! And I thought to myself, ah, ah. So that's the reason we came to Mars, so *that's* the reason men shoot off their rockets."

"Will—"

"Let me finish. Not to make money, no. Not to see the sights, no. Those are the lies men tell, the fancy reasons they give themselves. Get rich, get famous, they say. Have fun, jump around, they say. But all the while, inside, something else is ticking along the way it ticks in salmon or whales, the way it ticks, by God, in the smallest microbe you want to name. And that little clock that ticks in everything living, you know what it says?

"It says get away, spread out, move along, keep swimming. Run to so many worlds and build so many towns that *nothing* can ever kill man. You *see*, Carrie? It's not just we who have come to Mars, it's the race, the whole darn human race depending on how we make out in our lifetime. This thing is so big I want to laugh, I'm so scared stiff of it."

He felt the boys walking steadily behind him and he felt Carrie

beside him, and he wanted to see her face and how she was taking all this, but he didn't look there, either.

"All this is no different to me and Dad walking the fields when I was a boy, casting seed by hand when our machine broke down and we'd no money to fix it. It had to be done somehow for the later crops. Carrie, do you *remember* those Sunday-paper articles, THE EARTH WILL FREEZE IN A MILLION YEARS? I cried once, as a boy, reading articles like that. My mother asked why. I'm crying for all those poor people up ahead, I said. Don't worry about them, mother said.

"But, Carrie, that's my whole point; we *are* worrying about them. Or we wouldn't be here. It matters if Man with a capital M keeps going. There's nothing better than Man with a capital M in my book. I'm prejudiced, of course, because I'm one of the breed. But if there's any way to get hold of that immortality men are always talking about, this is the way—spread out—seed the universe. Then you've got a harvest against crop failures anywhere down the line. No matter if Earth has famines or the rust comes in. You've got the new wheat lifting on Pluto or where-in-hell-ever man gets to in the next thousand years. I'm crazy over the idea, Carrie, crazy.

"When I finally hit on it, I got so excited I wanted to grab people, you, the boys, and tell them. But, hell, I knew that wasn't necessary. I knew a day or night would come when you'd hear that ticking in yourselves, too, and then you'd see, and no one'd have to say anything again about all this. It's big talk, Carrie, I know, and big thoughts for a man just short of five feet five, but, by all that's holy, it's true."

They moved through the deserted streets of the town and listened to the echoes of their walking feet.

"And this morning?" said Carrie.

"I'm coming to this morning," he said. "Part of *me* wants to go home, too. But the other part says if we go everything's lost. So I thought, what bothers us most? Some of the things we once had. Some of the boys' things, your things, mine. And I thought, if it takes an old thing to get a new thing started, by God, I'll use the old thing.

"I remember from history books that a thousand years ago they put charcoals in a hollowed-out cow-horn, blew on them during the day, so they carried their fire on marches from place to place, to start a fire every night from the sparks left over from morning. Always a new fire, but always something of the old in it.

"So I weighed and balanced it off. Is the Old worth all our money, I asked. No! It's only the things we *did* with the Old

that have any worth. Well, then, is the New worth *all* our money, I asked. Do you feel like investing in the day after the middle of next week? Yes! I said. If I can fight this thing that makes us want to go back to Earth, I'd dip my money in kerosene and strike a match! "

Carrie and the two boys did not move. They stood on the street, looking at him as if he were a storm that had passed over and around, almost blowing them from the ground, a storm that was now dying away.

" The freight rocket came in this morning," he said, quietly. " Our delivery's on it. Let's go and pick it up."

They walked slowly up the three steps into the rocket depot and across the echoing floor towards the freight room that was just sliding back its doors, opening for the day.

" Tell us again about the salmon," said one of the boys.

In the middle of the warm morning they drove out of town in a hired lorry filled with great crates and boxes and parcels and packages, long ones, tall ones, short ones, flat ones, all numbered and neatly addressed to one William Prentiss, New Toledo, Mars.

" Will," said Carrie, over and over again, " Will."

They stopped the lorry by the hut and the boys jumped down and helped their mother out. For a moment, Will sat behind the wheel, and then slowly got out himself to walk round and look into the back of the truck at the crates.

And by noon all but one of the boxes were opened and their contents placed on the sea-bottom where the family stood among them.

" Carrie . . ."

And he led her up the old porch steps that now stood uncrated on the edge of town.

" Listen to 'em, Carrie."

The steps squeaked and whispered underfoot.

" What do they say, tell me what they say? "

She stood on the ancient wooden steps, holding on to herself, and could not tell him.

He waved his hand. " Front porch here, living-room there, dining-room, kitchen, three bedrooms. Part we'll build new, part we'll bring. Of course, all we've got here now is the front porch, some parlour furniture, and the old bed."

" All that money, Will! "

He turned, smiling. " You're not angry, now, look at me! You're not angry. We'll bring it all up, next month, next year. The cut glass vases, that Armenian carpet your mother gave us in 1961! Just *let* the sun explode! "

They looked at the other crates, numbered and lettered: front-porch swing, wicker rocker, hanging Chinese crystals . . .

" I'll blow them myself to make them ring."

They set the front door on the top of the stairs, with its little panes of coloured glass, and Carrie looked through the strawberry window.

" What do you see? " But he knew what she saw, for he gazed through the coloured glass, too. And there was Mars, with its cold sky warmed and its dead seas fired with colour, with its hills like mounds of strawberry ice, and its sand like burning charcoals sifted by wind. The strawberry window, the strawberry window breathed soft rose colours on the land and filled the mind and the eye with the light of never-ending dawn.

Bent there, looking through, he heard himself say: " The town'll be out this way in a year. This'll be a shady street, you'll have your porch, and you'll have friends. You won't *need* all this so much then. But starting right here, with this little bit that's familiar, watch it spread, watch Mars change so you'll know it as if you'd known it all your life."

He ran down the steps to the last and as-yet unopened, canvas-covered crate. With his pocket-knife he cut a hole in the canvas. " Guess! " he said.

" My kitchen stove? My furnace? "

" Not in a million years." He smiled very gently. " Sing me a song. Sing me a song worth all the money we had in the bank and now don't have, but who gives a blast in hell," he said.

" I don't know anything but *Genevieve, Sweet Genevieve*! "

" Sing that," he said. But she could not start the song. He saw her lips move and try, but there was no sound.

He ripped the canvas wider and shoved his hand into the crate and touched around for a quiet moment, and started to sing the words himself, until he moved his hand a last time and then a single clear piano chord sprang out on the morning air.

" There," he said. " Let's take it right on to the end. Every-one! Here's the harmony."

* * *

ALL OR NOTHING

Purists in all walks of life, I find, are very much like the famous foreign conductor who came to England many years ago and had as much difficulty with the orchestra as he had with the English language. After a particularly stormy rehearsal, the conductor turned angrily to the orchestra and cried: " So! You think I know nothings! I tell you I know damn-all! "

SPIKE HUGHES, *Second Movement*

Stuff and Nonsense

by ARTHUR J. GILROY

BILL PURVIS, master of the river-barge *Bootle's Queen*, was well-known on Merseyside as a gay spark with the ladies, but Bill was also a very wary bird, and no female had ever managed to net him. He'd had a few narrow squeaks, once having been saved from the altar by a lucky fall down the hold, while on another occasion, a week in Walton Gaol on a charge of striking a dock-master had preserved him from matrimony.

When he first saw Mrs. Mellor, owner of The Dead Man's Chest public house, and relict of a defunct policeman (who had suffered under Mrs. Mellor's yoke for a brief spell and given up the ghost in despair) Bill at once saw that she was the answer to a bargee's prayer.

Mrs. Mellor was, by any standard, a regal figure. Junoesque in proportions, she presented a broad front to all her troubles, and could easily be mistaken from the rear for the battleship, *King George V*.

Her face was a trifle battle-scarred, as became her position of owner of a dockside pub. A hastily flung glass had ended its career round her right ear, whipped the lobe off it, and left a small canyon round about. Her nose had thrust itself violently into a docker's fist and taken a turn for the worse, while her eyes were more often black-and-blue than their natural colour of grey.

These physical qualities did not detract from Bill's admiration for her. Bill liked his gals tough. More to the point, thought Bill, that curve to her nose resembled a pound-sign, and no matter what Mrs. Mellor's features were like, her money was lovely. She had wads of it, and the more Bill thought of the free beer and pocket-money he would probably get, the more he liked the idea of wedded bliss.

Although Mrs. Mellor had so far been only lukewarm in her

affections to her many wooers, Bill, after a few evenings spent in the saloon bar, seemed to have caught her eye.

A few passing words on his first meeting with the widow developed into those sure signs of love in Liverpool, the exchange of hearty cuffs on various portions of the anatomy. Bill, his head ringing from Mrs. Mellor's hefty blows, would stagger back to his barge, his heart aglow with love, and his ears aglow with cracks from her leg-of-mutton fist.

When Bill was offered a parrot for ten bob by the mate of one of E.D.'s, he saw a chance to make a name with Mrs. Mellor.

The mate explained to Bill, with a few naughty words thrown in, that the parrot couldn't speak a word, and that if he, the mate, could get hold of the black robber who'd sold it to him, he'd do unmentionable things to him.

Bill, being a true "Poolie," beat him down to seven and sixpence and retired to his barge in high spirits. For a bargee he was very versatile, by way of being a fair sort of ventriloquist, and in this mute and stupid parrot he saw the means of eventually becoming keeper of the keys to The Dead Man's cellars.

That night, dressed in his best reefer and scarf, Bill, with the parrot in a new cage, made his way gleefully up to Mrs. Mellor's sanctum. When he had craved a word with the fair object of his devotion, Mrs. Mellor led him to her best parlour, a place of horsehair furniture and antimacassars.

"Mrs. Mellor," began Bill, apprehensively, "for a long while I've admired you from a distance, and to mark my regard for you, I have brought you a parrot. This parrot will be good company for you while I'm away at Manchester. I hope you'll accept it—with my love."

Mrs. Mellor's frosty face lit up, resembling a storm lamp, with her scars cutting across the glow like the bars on the lamp. She was obviously delighted, and to show it, she broached a bottle of Vat 69 of which Bill and herself partook freely.

Her joy was complete when the bird seemed to say to Bill, "Eh, Bill, did you ever see a lovelier girl?"

Bill replied he hadn't, whereupon the parrot went on to compliment Mrs. Mellor on her beauty, her figure, and her kind heart.

Naturally, Mrs. Mellor fell for it, and soon Bill found she wasn't averse to a little cuddling, his only difficulty being the fact that his arms couldn't reach round her waist. In fact, they barely spanned her from side to side.

From that night onward, Bill became the virtual owner of the pub, while the talking parrot was the star attraction and brought scores of new customers. It was mooted by the older barproppers that before long, Bill and Mrs. Mellor would become

one in wedlock—although Mrs. Mellor was more than one at any time.

All went swimmingly for a while, and Bill and his parrot were in clover, the one being well treated with beer and the other with seeds. Nemesis, however, was not blind to Bill's infamous fraud, and one morning, to his dismay, he received orders to bring a barge round from Barrow. This involved his staying in Barrow for three weeks while the new barge was completed.

Vainly he begged Mrs. Mellor for a loan of the parrot. It was no use, she said, she loved it too much. With a sad heart Bill set out from Lime Street station to his new barge at Barrow.

The three weeks dragged on slowly, and of an evening, Bill walked the streets of Barrow, gloomy and depressed. He dreaded Mrs. Mellor finding out his deceptions; he could only hope she would attribute the parrot's silence to his absence.

The barge was completed to time. Bill took command and, with his crew of one boy, was soon being towed out of Barrow to the lovely shores of Liverpool.

Having finally secured his new command in Albert Dock, he dressed carefully and set off for The Dead Man's Chest, his emotions a mixture of dread and hope. When, however, he stepped inside the familiar grained doors, to his joy he saw the parrot looking as intelligent as ever in its gilded cage.

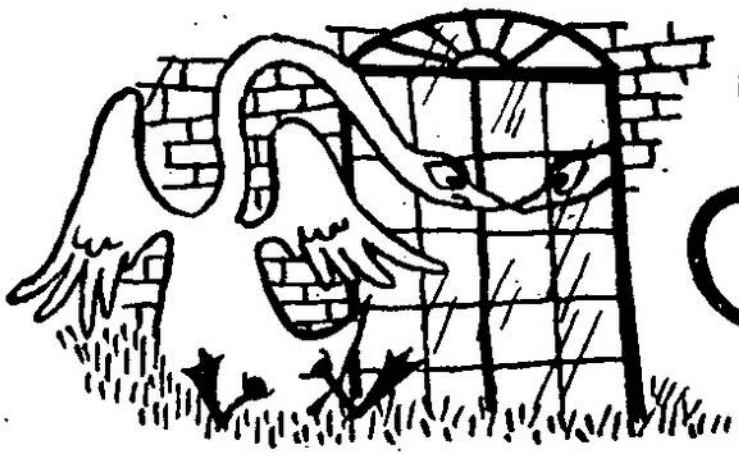
Mrs. Mellor was as affable as usual and served him a double Scotch with what seemed to Bill a glad manner. He drank it with gusto and turned to the parrot. "Hullo, Poll, how's my lady-love? Has Mrs. Mellor forgotten me?"

"Not on your life, Bill," the parrot replied. "She's been breaking her heart for you."

The next thing Bill knew, a huge hand gripped his collar and a beefy fist had given him a fourpenny one between the eyes. A hearty kick finally landed poor Bill on the floor at the far end of the bar. From rapidly swelling eyes, Bill watched Mrs. Mellor take the parrot from the cage, hurl it on the floor, and jump on it. To his surprise, her twenty-two stone crushed no blood out of the parrot. What emerged from its body was a mixture of sawdust, wire, and wadding.

Dimly he watched, and then he heard Mrs. Mellor say, "And to think I went to the trouble of having it stuffed when it died."

★ *For its breezy gusto, this little story by a Second Engineer was awarded a first prize in a short story competition (limit* 2,000 *words) held by the Seafarers' Education Service, and judged by Argosy.*

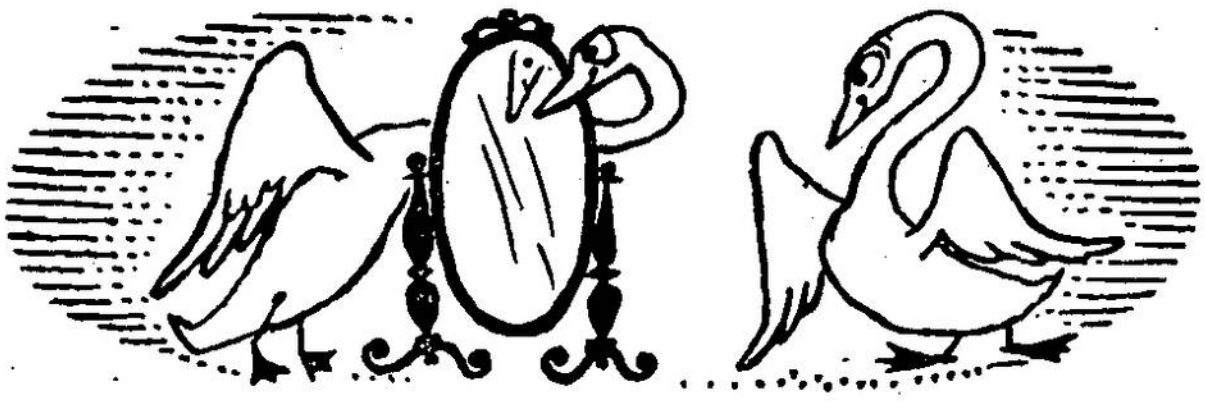


Swan

ATTENTION, all bird haters, while we read you the following letter: " I have certain information that will be of value to any of your readers who may be tempted, during the spring, to be kind to nesting swans. It does not pay to cast your bread upon the waters.

" A few years ago, two friends of mine, Kay and Fred, built a house around a picture window on a Westhampton creek for the purpose of observing the wild-fowl life, especially the swan flotillas that patrolled the area. The first spring, Kay took pity on a cob and his mate raising four hungry cygnets, and fed them mountains of bread. The next spring, the pair was back on her lawn with a family of eight cygnets. Fred refused to foot the bread bill again. He estimated that the previous year's total would have bought a case of gin. Put the swans on short rations, he said, and let them supplement that manna with an honest day's work.

" This decision infuriated the cob. Instead of going to work on the bottom of the creek, he began to picket the house. Kay couldn't go near her garden. Pots, pans, water from the garden hose, and the usual broomstick failed to dislodge the cob. He lowered his neck, fussed up his feathers, and hissed her inside. Then, as she went about her housework, he stood at the picture window and beat his wings and beak against the pane. She was forced to slither past on her stomach to avoid his wrath. The cob's actions went on for two weeks—a mounting crescendo of fury at the picture window all hours of the day.



" Finally, with the cob beating a tattoo on the window, and his wife and children lined up behind him to shame her into another loaf of bread, Kay called the Audubon Society in New York. 'The swan has taken over your property,' she was told. 'He sees his reflection in the picture window and thinks it is another swan, with whom he must do battle. Board up the window.'

" Kay then called up the Museum of Natural History. Obviously, the Bird Department told her, you have a swan there who has taken over your property. He sees his reflection in the picture window and thinks it's another swan. You must board up the window.

" At this point, there was a knock at the back door—the egg man. Kay confided her dilemma to him. 'Got a big black umbrella?' he asked. She handed him one. He went out in the yard and opened it, then shut it, at the swan. The cob and his family rushed to the creek, sailed regally downstream, and never came back."

Swan Saga, from *The New Yorker*

Fine Feathers

Scholars call the masculine swan a cob;
I call him a narcissistic snob.
He looks in the mirror over and over,
And claims to have never heard of Pavlova.

OGDEN NASH, *The Swan*

Swan's Down!

London. Palace Theatre. Pavlova dancing the dying swan. Feather falls off her dress. Two silent Englishmen. One says, " Moulting." That is all they say.

ARNOLD BENNETT, *Journal*

TEMPLE OF KAMBU

BY ALAN JENKINS

HAD it not been for Maxine's snake-bite, we could have made the journey from Aranya to Angkor on foot in three days. By car we could have done it in just over three hours; but where we wanted to go, there were no roads, no tracks, no natives. Or if there were, we would be the first people in the world to find them, in a patch of South-East Asian jungle eighty miles wide, where no European had penetrated for seven hundred or perhaps a thousand years.

If that sounds over-dramatic, let me explain. Maxine and I are naturalists. We spend our lives in the few remaining bits of the earth's surface that have not been mapped. Then we go home and write books about them. I am solely concerned with animals, but Maxine is an authority in a wider field. On this last trip it came in useful.

In Viet Nam two hundred and fifty miles away on the other side of the Mékong River, the French were trying to salvage a strip of their empire in a long, squalid little war. We never gave it a thought. We had come to Cambodia to study the home life of the gibbon ape.

Half a day after we turned south towards Battambang, we knew we were lost. With four years of the Chindits behind me, I had scorned native guides, scorned all aids to navigation except a cheap compass and some ten-year-old memories of jungle lore. We had food for five days, a rifle with a head torch, an old tommy cooker, and first-aid kit. On the second day we had made contact with a small colony of gibbons and taken some photographs. Then Maxine stepped on a baby cobra, and I was thankful for the serum we had packed with our rations.

I tried to carry her, but we didn't get very far. The forest here was thicker than I ever knew it could be in this part of the world: a solid mass of tree-trunks, thorns, and clinging lianas like living tentacles.

On the fourth night we unrolled our packs and lay down under mosquito-nets. Maxine was in great pain—greater than I knew, or I would have made her turn back. I lay awake for hours, trying

He swayed on the edge of the roof silhouetted against the glare of torches

to identify animal calls. Tiger, certainly; the bark of a stag calling to a hind; a frightened pheasant.

We were running short of water: I had expected to meet half a dozen rivulets that I knew flowed into Tonlé Sap, the Great Lake. But where was the Great Lake?

On the morning of the fifth day, as dawn sent a few pinpricks of light through the dense tree-canopy above our heads, a scream woke me. Maxine was no longer lying beside me.

She had limped a little distance into the forest, and her voice came from perhaps fifty yards away. I shook myself free of my mosquito-net and went stumbling off into the blackness in the direction of her voice.

I found her staring ahead at something which at first I took to be an enormous, gnarled tree-trunk. She was trembling, laughing nervously, pointing at the thing that had caused her to cry out. " It seemed to be looking at me, as if it was alive," she gasped. " Sorry, darling—did I give you a shock? "

A shaft of light from between the branches lay across what I had taken for a tree-trunk. It was a massive face in solid stone, twice my own height, smooth and resigned, its eyes closed. The peaceful face of Buddha, and yet it was not Buddha.

" Lokesvara," Maxine breathed. " The god of the four faces. He-who-Looks-down-with-Compassion. He who can change his body into Siva or Brahma at will."

The sliver of light broadened as a breeze ruffled the branches overhead, and Maxine cried, " Look! "

I followed her gaze to the left of the colossal face, and saw the profile of another Lokesvara. Between the two stood a ruined gateway, the mighty stones forced apart by the grotesque boles of banyan trees. It was a gateway, not an arch: the ancient Khmers, who had built it eight or perhaps eleven hundred years ago, did not know how to build arches.

Maxine leaned painfully on my arm, but her eyes were brilliant with wonder. Her grip on my arm tightened. " This was once an open place," she murmured, " perhaps a city. If we go on cutting our way through the jungle, we shall find other gates like this. Farther on, there will be guardian lions, carved in sandstone. Farther on still—" She swallowed hard and swayed. I gave her some water from my bottle.

" A temple of some kind," she whispered. " Indo-China is full of them. The forests have choked and hidden them. Some

of them, like the Angkor Vat, are famous all over the world. Others—others have never been found, let alone mapped."

She shivered and swayed again. I led her gently back to our encampment, and gave her an injection. Not far away, we heard a gibbon ape give his idiotic, hysterical cry. Maxine was very weak. We lay down and slept until afternoon.

And then an unbelievably strange thing happened. We heard music. A tinkling, as of a broken musical box, or raindrops falling on a sheet of tin; a shrill piping, and cross-rhythms of drums, hollow gourdlike instruments in different keys. The gibbon gave a last mad cackle and fell silent. The music faded like a mirage, but it had had its effect.

Maxine, filled with excitement and fresh strength, plunged into the dense undergrowth and began cutting her way through the lianas in the direction of the music. I rolled up our packs and stumbled after her. We slashed at the black shadows like blindfold drunkards, the unseen midday sun making a fetid hothouse of the vegetation around us.

Forty minutes later, we came suddenly into blinding light. The forest was no more: sky and earth swam before our eyes. We groped for our dark glasses and put them on. Instantly the picture came into focus, and we saw the second unbelievable thing: a wall, long and low, like the Great Wall of China, stretching away to the horizon; a wall from which palm trees sprouted, breaking it yet holding it together; trees and tangled lianas and wild flowers.

And behind that, another wall, humped at regular intervals with worn, devilish, overgrown heads, whether of men or gods or beasts we could not tell. And rising beyond that, a seemingly endless colonnade; and still farther within, a long flat building, so vast that it could only be a temple; and deep in the centre of it, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a cluster of five, six, seven tapering towers, terrifying in their desolation, dazzled us with their whiteness. A wide, crumbling causeway of stones and steps and broken statuettes led up to a squat black entrance in the outer wall.

I felt ghostly-cold, as if we had walked into another age. Forty minutes ago, about a mile away, we had heard—or thought we heard—music. Music, it seemed, from other centuries. But there was no one here to make music. This temple was empty, we were certain. Such utter stillness—a kind of deafening silence—was difficult to fathom.

"But the music . . ." Maxine whispered. She sank wearily to the ground, so exhausted that I gave her all the water we had left. "The music," she muttered stupidly. "There are many

hundreds of known ruins here in Indo-China. The fact that this one isn't on any map doesn't mean that . . ." Her voice trailed away. She was staring at something on the causeway, a speck of brilliant colour that moved.

It was a tiny figure, a girl carrying something carefully in front of her. She glided with little steps, her heavy skirt hindering her movements. She paused at a large, flat stone beside the causeway, knelt, and arranged something on it. Then she stood up, turned, and saw us.

Maxine called to her in Laotian, and I shouted a greeting in bad Chinese—neither of us had a word of Cambodian—but she did not seem to understand. She ran for about two hundred yards, as if trying to escape us, then turned again, waiting for us to approach.

She was very slender, with small Mongoloid eyes and a calm expression. She was perhaps thirteen years old. I tried desperately to tell her, by signs, that Maxine was sick and we were both hungry. Maxine pointed to the food—if it was food—that the girl had left on the flat stone.

The girl raised her head sharply in a negative gesture. Then she said three words in her own language which Maxine seemed to understand: "king," "temple," and what sounded like "madman."

"I think she's trying to tell us that the food is an offering to the King of the Temple," Maxine said. "It's the word *talang* I don't understand. It means 'mad' in Laotian."

The girl, hearing the word *talang*, nodded vigorously.

"The Mad One is King," Maxine translated, and looked at me hopelessly. "I suppose it's a god of some kind, but I can't think of anything in Buddhism or Hinduism to account for it."

The girl went away, returning half an hour later with her entire family, bringing cooked rice and vegetables and bananas. They seemed neither friendly nor hostile, simply curious. They pointed into the jungle where they had come from, as if inviting us to stay in their village.

The Laotian words for "snake" and "tiger" were repeated several times, but I exhibited my rifle and electric torch, and grinned as reassuringly as I could.

Then they pointed to the Temple, making signs with their hands, signs that said: "Don't go in there—it is dangerous."

At length, when the sun began to sink behind those colossal white towers, the villagers went away. We sat gazing at the Temple in the golden sunset.

Suddenly Maxine stood up.

"I'm going inside to look around."

I tried to stop her. If it was a holy place, the people might lynch us. In any case, it would be better to wait until morning. But Maxine, refreshed by the food we had eaten, had regained all her old obstinacy. " I'm going in," she repeated, " and you're coming with me. Bring that blunderbuss of yours."

" I can't take a gun into a temple," I said, half seriously.

" Bring it," she grinned. " If this place is as holy as that girl seemed to think, we've no right to be there. And I'm not going to let anything spoil our discovery. Unless I'm very much mistaken, this is one of the biggest archaeological finds since Mouhot stumbled on Angkor, ninety years ago."

As we walked, Maxine still limping, her ankle terribly swollen from the snake-bite, she spoke of the Khmers, the " small-eyed people who worshipped snakes," that lost race who once ruled all South-East Asia from Angkor Thom, a vast, populous city, now a trail of ruins choked by the jungle.

The seven white towers were now black silhouettes. We had to crane our necks to see their tops: they seemed as high as a cathedral. We came to the flat stone near the entrance where the girl had put the offering.

Maxine looked at me in the ashen twilight, and her voice came unsteadily: " It's gone. The food's been taken."

" Did you see anybody? " I asked.

" No. If there were anyone here, we should have seen. Besides, it must have been intended as an offering to whatever gods or spirits are supposed to inhabit this place."

" Maxine, for heaven's sake, let's come back tomorrow in daylight. The girl's family said we could put up at their village."

But Maxine wouldn't listen. " We're going in."

As the sun died, the moon came up. We went through the main gate, vast Buddha-faces and sacred animals staring at us sightlessly. Now we were inside the huge outer colonnade, every foot of it filled with carved images of soldiers, elephants, three-eyed Siva astride his bull, celestial nymphs.

From time to time we came suddenly upon a smooth Buddha twice as high as ourselves, in that eternal pose of peace and relaxation, so motionless that his very stillness made him seem alive.

We went through another ring of outer buildings, up steeper and steeper flights of massive steps, always climbing, climbing towards the seven great towers that were still many hundreds of yards away, for this Temple was the size of a city.

As we drew nearer, there was a feeling like a cube of ice in my stomach—the feeling that we were being watched. Maxine groped for my free hand, and I felt her trembling.

"There *is* someone here," she whispered. "But I don't think they've seen us yet."

"They've seen us all right," I muttered. "They're drawing us in. They're probably all round us in the darkness . . .Maxine, I'm scared."

"I'm scared, too, darling. But I want to go on. Besides, I don't think there are a lot of people here. I think—"

We rounded a corner where a huge statue of a seven-headed serpent jutted obscenely against the moon, and there it was: the Inner Temple sheer above us, unspeakably vast and black, the seven towers tipped with silver light. Any fears we might have had were blown away by wonder and feverish excitement.

A violent crack overhead shook us out of our dream. Maxine swallowed a scream and clung to my arm. Something thudded to the ground beside us, and a shower of dust came down about our ears.

"A stone," I gasped. "Someone threw a stone."

It was followed by a cataract of sound that cut through our eardrums. A million shrill screams tore the air to shreds, and the moonlight was suddenly blotted out by a dense cloud of whirling creatures. Bats—uncountable thousands of them—poured out of the Inner Temple, billowing at us and swerving clear about a foot away from our faces.

In an instant, Maxine became a demented child, clinging to me and sobbing with horror. The bats swirled for several more minutes before the shrieking died down and they clustered in the crevices.

Then came the second stone, a very heavy one, rattling ineffectually along the ground. The thrower seemed to be in the cavernous doorway of the Temple, though we could see nothing. I caught my breath with pain as a third stone numbed my right wrist, so that I nearly dropped my rifle. The stone careened along a bas-relief behind us and clattered to the ground. A smaller cloud of bats shrieked, whirled, and settled again.

I flashed my torch on the doorway to draw fire, but Maxine snatched it out of my hand and dragged me quickly a few yards farther along the wall. "Idiot!" she breathed, "do you want to show them where we are?"

"I want to get some idea where *they* are," I muttered.

A fourth stone, only a pebble, slapped viciously into the wall exactly where we had been standing a moment before.

"Well, they're not armed," I said. "All they can do is throw stones."

We waited in silence for perhaps ten minutes, but no more stones came. Whoever resented our presence here was content

to scare us away, I told myself. He—or they—thought we had been put to flight, and was ready to give up the attack.

I was wrong. Someone was creeping along the wall towards us, barefoot, and silent except for his breathing, which I could hear distinctly. I handed my gun to Maxine. If there was only one attacker, I could handle him without weapons. I caught a movement in the shadow and lunged at it.

My fingers closed on a scrawny neck, and I felt a man's matted beard brush loathsomely against my cheek as we struggled. His face was white, and he was not very strong. He was half naked, and he smelt dirty. He gave a squealing gasp and went suddenly limp. Maxine shouted at him in Laotian and Chinese, but he showed no understanding.

"There's a light in the Temple," she said. "Bring him inside so we can look at him."

I hustled the man through the gaping door and made for a faint, flickering radiance deep in the interior. It came from a fire of sticks and grass, and as we approached it, I became aware of the vastness of the building we were in.

All that we had seen so far was nothing to this. Here human imagination had run splendidly amok. Vast Buddhas sprang out of the stone; grotesque beasts with devilish faces were woven into every foot of the battered walls. Lines of statuettes disappeared into dark infinity, and a labyrinth of small shrines and altars led off from the inner enclosure. Shafts of moonlight cut down through the ruined roof, revealing weird tangles of vegetation that had grown up between the stones.

Beside the fire was a pile of dried grasses and twigs which was the bearded man's bed. I pushed him down onto it. He sat there, looking vacantly at us, his legs crossed. He was very dark and wild, and wore a soiled loincloth, and a ragged upper garment slung across one shoulder. He seemed to be about thirty years old.

I shuddered as a thought ran through my head: perhaps he's a leper and that's why he lives alone and has food brought to him.

The man stared at us intently, as if trying to remember something. Then a cunning expression slowly crossed his face, and he said something so unexpected that it took our breath away: "*Vous avez du cognac, monsieur?*"

The utter absurdity of it was too much for me. I glanced at Maxine, but her face showed that she had heard the same. This creature was asking me for some brandy—in French; good French.

I had a flask, and poured a little into the screw-top. His hands shook violently as he held the cup, so that he almost spilt it.

"Vous êtes français?" Maxine asked him.

"I am the King of Cambodia," he shouted. "I have been King here for eight hundred years. This is Kambu's Temple." His eyes glittered insanely. "And I forbid you to enter this place."

"He must be a French colonial who's taken to drink and gone native," Maxine whispered.

I gave the man my flask, never taking my eyes off him. He drank greedily, clutching the bottle as if afraid it would be wrenched away from him. His hands never stopped shaking.

"Now, tell me who you really are," I said.

The brandy seemed to bring him back to some sort of sanity. His head sank forward onto his chest. It was a gesture of obstinacy, not of defeat.

"You will tell me first who *you* are," he muttered at last. "You are English, and so is the woman."

"My name is Francis Hearne," I said.

"Hearne," the man repeated. His head shot up, but it was Maxine he was looking at now.

"Then you," he stammered, "you—is it possible?—you are Maxine Hearne?"

"Yes. How do you know my name?"

A cloud seemed to pass across his mind, and he looked vacant for a few moments.

Then he jerked his head again and muttered: "You are the well-known writer. I have read your book on the—the Brahman cult in Sumatra."

Maxine started to say something, but the man gabbled on quickly—"You do not know me. I came out here with Latour-Giral of the Far East School when I was only fourteen. He was my godfather . . ."

So this was the Mad King the natives had told us about, this grotesque, pitiful creature with the shaking hands and the gasping, wailing voice.

There were moments when I thought he was quite mad; and yet there was a crazy logic in the story he told.

He was a deserter from the French Army. He had joined only because he was penniless, and volunteered for Indo-China because it was his one chance of getting back to the country that fascinated him. In those days—six years ago—it had seemed impossible that the war could go on much longer. It would be over by the New Year, everyone said so. He could get his discharge in Saigon or Hanoi; he would find funds there some-

how and start his own expedition. Once he was on the spot, everything would go easily.

At Kao Bang he had lost his nerve. A shell burst beside him and the six men of his patrol. He had thrown himself to the ground a fraction of a second earlier than the others. When he crawled to his feet again and looked round, nothing remained of the six men.

There followed a dark period he could not remember. A hospital, where there were men who thought someone was trying to murder them, men who believed they were dictators, men who screamed for their mothers . . .

He remembered dropping from a window; then no more until, days or weeks later, he saw the Mékong River before him, four miles wide, between the Four Thousand Islands and the Papheng Falls. He had crossed it in a piragua, but he could not remember landing on the other side. That was how it was, his memory flashing on and off like a light.

He remembered trying to get to Sambor and Phnom Koulen, remembered being fed at a Buddhist monastery, yet could not recall finding the Temple of Kambu. He had lived here for three or four years; always in fear of the French authorities, always in fear of being betrayed as a deserter.

At first he had gone out at night to get fruit and water, but they had given him dysentery. The village people had found him collapsed on the Temple steps, had brought him herbal medicines and food, thinking he was a holy man. But they had never dared to enter the Temple, for fear of being killed by the gods.

So, already, he had become a legend. He was the spirit of Kambu, the wandering Indian prince, who had founded their race fifteen centuries ago; and in his rages, he believed it. Yet, when we had entered the Temple, his sick mind had been convinced we were soldiers or police coming to arrest him. Even now he distrusted us, his eyes twitching and his emaciated hands shaking.

" But the war in Indo-China is over," Maxine told him gently. " The French are leaving."

" No, no. I do not believe it," the creature moaned, violently shaking his head. " It is a trick. They will drive me out of here and kill me."

" Who will? " I demanded. " This is unknown jungle here. There are no French for sixty or seventy miles. And if there were, they wouldn't be interested in you."

I paused to watch his reaction to my next words. " You're not a deserter. You're sick. You've lost your memory."

He kept his distrustful eyes on me, but said nothing.

" Can you remember your name? " Maxine asked softly. " For the godson of Latour-Giral, that shouldn't be too difficult."

His lips twitched back from his teeth in a sneer: " Derond."

" It'll do, I suppose," Maxine said. " Look, Derond, we haven't the slightest desire to do you any harm. Get that clear, will you? "

" After you have left this place, you will come back. You will come back with workmen, you will explore and study and write your books." The man's chest rose and fell quickly. " You will bring all the world to this Temple I have discovered. This Temple which is *mine*—" His voice rose. " *Mine*, do you hear? I am Kambu. I have lived for fifteen hundred years, and my bride is of the Snake People . . . You are the only human beings who have ever entered this place since I consecrated it—"

He broke off, listening intently, gasping for breath. A strange sound was filling the ruins, a sound Maxine and I had already heard. The music, the weird, repetitive music, piping, tinkling, hollowly beating.

" My people come to worship me." The tattered wretch stood up, swaying, his eyes burning. " I will go and show myself to them."

I do not know exactly how it happened, but suddenly he slipped away. He must have darted off into the black shadows of the masonry, of which he knew every cranny. I thought he had gone down the main aisle of the Inner Temple, but I was wrong.

There was a clicking noise behind us, and I spun round to see him holding my rifle. Maxine had taken it from me while I was giving Derond some brandy. I had not seen her put it down, but he had. There was enough of the soldier in him to understand the safety catch, anyway.

I shouted at him to drop it, but once again he had hidden himself.

" Get out of this place, both of you! " I heard his voice from behind one of the vast Buddhas. " I shall follow you. Do as I tell you."

" What is he going to do? " Maxine whispered. She was still too astonished to begin to be afraid.

" Shoot us, I should imagine," I muttered irritably. " To make the local legend come true."

" All that about Kambu—was that an act? "

" I don't know. Do what he wants until we get a chance of retaliation. There are only two rounds in that gun, and he can't be much of a shot."

We walked slowly back the way we had come, the bats rising in a cloud of hysteria as we stumbled down the steep steps below

the towers. I looked once over my shoulder, but could see nothing, though I felt Derond's presence behind every wall and statue, never once in the same place.

It is easy enough to grab the muzzle of a rifle and wrench it out of a man's hand—if you can see him. But now Derond was invisible. He knew this vast place, knew every inch of cover it afforded . . . We reached the outer colonnade once more, the music getting nearer every moment.

I felt Maxine grab my arm. She had seen some steps to our left, faintly illuminated by a shaft of moonlight. Suddenly, seized with the same impulse, we were dashing up them. For all we knew, we were cutting ourselves off so that Derond could destroy us at his leisure. But anything was better than going through that main gate again onto the open causeway, where he could shoot us down from the shadows.

We came out onto the flat top of the outer wall, and I pulled Maxine into the shelter of one of those grotesque statues—it was a seven-headed cobra, perhaps four times my height—that were spaced regularly along it. Now, if Derond were following us, we had the advantage of him. We clung together, fighting for breath; and suddenly became aware of the music again.

Maxine cried out in astonishment. I followed her gaze as she looked down upon the causeway some thirty feet below. The whole area in front of the Temple was lit by flaring torches, we could not see who held them, but by their light, in the centre, we saw something that neither of us will forget in our lifetime.

We were looking down upon a forest of tiny golden minarets, the pagoda-like head-dresses of dancers rippling gently in an almost motionless dance. I have seen the Cambodian dancing-girls they put on for tourists in Phnom Penh, but they were not like these.

Heads and feet were turned in subtle poses, each with its special meaning. Their brilliant costumes shimmered slowly like fireflies. Their unnaturally supple fingers, doubled back as they had been trained to do from babyhood so that their knuckles touched their arms, told wild legends, centuries old, of the ancient Khmers, their ancestors. And they had come to do all this in homage to the Mad One of the Temple.

The padding of bare feet, a faint clash of the rifle knocking against a wall in the darkness told us that Derond was near. Suddenly he was silhouetted against the glare of the torches below as he stood swaying on the sheer edge of the roof, momentarily fascinated by the vision of his worshippers.

I leapt at him while he was off his guard. I managed to grab

the muzzle of the rifle, as I had planned, but he reacted quicker than I expected. For a horrifying moment he held the rifle jabbed into my stomach, and I saw his fingers fumbling along the butt towards the trigger. By the time he had fired, I had closed with him.

For a second, I was conscious of nothing but the heat of the barrel and the stinging crash in my ears. Then a cry from Maxine told me she had been hit by a ricochet.

Derond still clung to the butt with an insane tenacity. He knew that if he let go, I would club him with it. We staggered back and forth, circling, teetering on the edge of the parapet. Down below, the music and the dancing had stopped; the crowd was watching us in utter silence.

I felt Maxine beside me, moaning faintly with pain, and saw that her arm was covered with blood. She was doing the only thing she could do to help me: she too was clinging to the barrel of the rifle.

Together we manœuvred Derond round so that his back was turned to the parapet. Then, as he let go of the butt, we drove it into him with all our force, and toppled him over the edge.

A crunch as his body hit the stone slabs below. He lay quite still, a pitifully small heap of skin and bones and rags.

The dancers, in shocked silence, stepped slowly backwards into the darkness, until only the glinting spires of their head-dresses were visible. The torchbearers moved slowly forward, surrounding the body. The silence was intolerable, as if these simple people had been struck dumb with grief and bewilderment.

"Oh, I hope he isn't dead," Maxine whispered. She sank down, clutching at her arm. I took out the field dressing I always carried and bandaged her clumsily.

Down there on the causeway, two men approached Derond's body reverently. As they lifted him up, I saw his emaciated head move. He was alive, but it would be a miracle if his spine were not broken.

Now they had taken him away, but the menacing semicircle of torchbearers remained. Murmurs swelled to chattering cries; they were working themselves into a vengeful rage. More and more men appeared in the flickering light, moving closer to the outer wall of the Temple. Clearly, they meant to attack us but were uncertain how to set about it.

What happened next was, for us, an anticlimax, but for the assembled crowd below it was the most terrifying thing they had ever experienced.

A harsh, buzzing noise came from beyond the seven great towers, a coughing roar like fifty two-stroke motor cycles. It

seemed as if a huge, pot-bellied black dragonfly hovered against the waning moon.

This crowd had certainly never seen a helicopter before, but they stood their ground for a full minute before breaking their ranks and withdrawing, carrying Derond's body with them.

In a few seconds our journey into the past had been shattered. We watched the flimsy, ungainly monster make a casual landing on the causeway. The rotors swished to a standstill, and a slim figure dropped lightly from the cockpit. I seized my torch, raced down the steps, and ran to meet him.

He was a youth of about twenty, in a crumpled battle dress and a kepi. He seemed amused to see me.

"Monsieur Hearne?" he said in French. "I'm Charbonnier of Air Reconnaissance. We have been looking for you and your wife. I have orders from my Commandant to take you back to Aranya."

I suppose I should have been hysterically glad to see him. I suppose I should have gasped, "Thank God, you've come!" and embraced this prosaic, spectacled youth from the twentieth century. But I was annoyed, actually annoyed, as I stood before him, flashing my torch up and down his battle dress. I had believed that Maxine and I were lost in the jungle, that there was no organization to search for us, that eighty-by-thirty miles of unmapped country (two thousand four hundred square miles sounded better) had led us into another age.

"It's very good of your Commandant," I said shortly. "How did you know where to look for us?"

"I didn't," Charbonnier grinned. "I saw flares and came down to see what was going on. I've never landed this damn contraption at night before."

Maxine was calling to us from the main gate of the Temple. "My wife is injured," I told Charbonnier.

Together we helped her to the helicopter. Then I collected our cameras and camping-kit from the edge of the forest. I still felt dazed and curiously deflated.

"But the Temple," I said. "Air Reconnaissance must have located it already. I—we hoped we had discovered it."

"No doubt you have," Charbonnier smiled and shrugged. An unimaginative young man—I rather disliked him. "There are so many ruins around here," he went on. "We've never bothered about this area much. It's of no military interest, you see. Unsuitable for infantry—impossible for tanks."

Maxine began to tell him of the Temple, of poor Derond, of the haunting music, and the weirdly beautiful dances. Charbonnier,

inspecting his engine, listened with polite abstraction, but his thoughts were far away.

" We'll send a Sikorsky over for Derond tomorrow," he said airily. " Poor devil, he's probably dead by now."

He climbed back into the cockpit and brightened up at once. " As for me, I'm off on demobilization leave in the afternoon. I live at Enghien-les-Bains, seven miles out of Paris. You know it? Ah, mes amis, you should see Enghien. Pretty little houses and parks . . ."

He switched on his engine, and the rotors began clumsily beating the air above our heads. " Ah, you can laugh at the suburbs if you like; madame—but Enghien is home to me."

Down there in the jungle, I saw the seven great towers like beehives in the moonlight, and the vast rectangle of the outer walls shrinking. Maxine, her head on my shoulder, was silent; perhaps she was asleep.

Charbonnier chattered incessantly, as much to himself as to us. " Pity I didn't find you sooner," he shouted above the sputter of the engine. " The Commandant had a duck for dinner. He'd have been glad of your company."

" Unfortunately," I said, " we had a previous engagement."

But Charbonnier wasn't listening. " Ah, but you should taste our ducks at Enghien! Now, personally I like them with slices of orange and red-wine sauce . . ."

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ANSWERS to CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

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1. *a. Stewart Granger b. Laurence Olivier c. Rex Harrison d. John Clements e. Mel Ferrer f. Lewis Casson*
2. *a. palette b. tutu c. score of " Lakmé " d. Hansard for 1954 e. piano f. pair of riding-boots*
3. *a. Louis XV b. Napoleon c. Louis XV d. the Dauphin, Lord Darnley, and the Earl of Bothwell*
4. *a. Jean Harlow b. Jenny Lind c. Anna Seward d. Florence Nightingale e. Cleopatra f. Catherine Howard*
5. *a. Sophie Tucker b. Mae West c. Queen Victoria*
6. *a. whole existence b. change her mind c. preaching*

★ ★ ★

A woman can't be fallen nowadays, there's nowhere to fall from.

EDWARD HYAMS, *The Slaughterhouse Informer*

In the Train

INTO the train they scramble anxiously,
Heaving the rugs and coats upon the rack,
Umbrella, mackintosh, sad panoply
Of English on holiday. They pack
The corridors in resignation. Mild
Admonishment they give to offspring bent
On treading on the toes of childless men.
The sandwiches come out. With one consent
They stuff their children as the hours go by,
And sticky sweets are passed from hand to hand.
Into the train the sun streams suddenly,
They shift their feet and gaze out on the land,
All green and gold, that gleams beyond the smoke
In a long plume that drapes the bulging train,
And knowingly they say, "It will not last,"
Teeth in a juicy pear, "it's bound to rain."
They talk about their garden plots; they talk
About the coalshed, did they turn the key?
They talk about the cat they left at home.
And then a small child thinks about the sea.

Into the carriage, down the corridor,
Tumbles a long blue wave, a starfish lies
Among the paper bags upon the floor,
Out of a tartan rug a seagull flies,
The Thermos flasks pour minnows with the tea,
The ladies' hats with seaweed bows are gay.

In crowded corridors they shift their feet.
The Englishman is on his holiday.

NANSI PUGH

BLACK SABRE

by

JOHN DICKSON CARR

It is 1805. The shadow of Napoleon's invasion army, straddling the Boulogne coast, lies over England. Alan Hepburn, a young Scots nobleman and British agent masquerading in France as the Vicomte de Bergerac, allows the wily French Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, to arrest him. Alan consents to unmask the deadly Captain Cut-throat, an invisible killer whose attacks on five sentries have thrown the Boulogne Camp into a panic.

As guard, Fouché sends his voluptuous agent, Ida de Sainte-Elme, Alan's ex-mistress, and young Captain Mercier, while an unseen escort, guessed at by Alan, is provided by the brutal Hussar lieutenant, Hans Schneider, whom Alan suspects of being Cut-throat's hireling. Also in the group is Madeleine Lenormand, Alan's lovely young wife, deserted by him as a French spy, whom he now finds in Fouché's clutches, under suspicion of being a British agent.

At the Park of Statues, where they stay at Boulogne, Madeleine shows her true allegiance by disposing of their guards, Mercier and Ida, using their own supplies of laudanum. When both lie in a drugged stupor, and a spying footman has been bound and gagged, Alan tells Madeleine his suspicions that the threat of

invasion is Napoleon's cover for a very different plan of campaign. Once confirmed, Alan will signal this information to the British frigate "Medusa," which daily runs audaciously close to the French shore. He and Madeleine agree to meet at the Sleeping Cat Inn, where a boat will take them to England—and renewed happiness together.

In Mercier's uniform, Alan rides into the Forest where, at the Field of Balloons, just as he has overheard that the "invasion" army is secretly on the march to Vienna, he is caught in the beam of a picket's lamp, which also reveals, at his feet, a new sentry victim, bearing the usual note by Captain Cut-throat, but this time reading: "If you want to know who I am, ask Fouché."

The alarm is raised. While Alan doubles back, wounded in the arm, a careless shot sets the gas-filled balloons on fire, and under the perilous cover of their flames, he clears the Forest, only to find his escape blocked by Schneider, face and weapon still blackened for this last ghost murder. Sabres drawn, the two enemies spur their horses on; but after one cut and parry, Schneider, also wounded, collapses off his horse, and Alan reaches the Inn and safety.

The next day, still weak from his wound, Alan rides into the Camp on his way to the cliffs.

ON the parade-ground at the Boulogne Camp, under a hot sun which was rapidly drying its bare-trampled earth, the review had not yet begun.

At intervals round that immense field stood tall white flagstaffs, gilded and crowned, from each of which fluttered a silk pennon inscribed with the name of one of the Emperor's victories in his first Italian campaign of '96. Even from a distance you would have seen *Montenotte*, *Millesimo*, *Dego*, *Ceva*, *Mondovi*, *Lodi*, *Castiglione*, *Bassano*, *Arcola*, among the names which curled out in gold letters and floated up with the outflowing breeze.

Beyond the flagstaffs, round three sides of a hollow oblong, were drawn up the younger foot regiments—their colours, dark blue faced with red or yellow or orange—under a glitter of bayonets as vast as light-points on the sea, with their drums in front of them. But no drums had as yet rolled, no muskets were at salute, no concentrated cheers had gone up from the onlookers thronging beyond.

Only the massed bands were first parading. There were twenty of them, the chosen of Boney's hundred regimental bands, though they looked small in that field.

Alan Hepburn, sitting a slow and heavy-bodied black horse on a hill some two hundred yards away from the southern edge of the parade-ground, found his own heart stirring and swinging to the intoxication of the music, as his eye was caught and exhilarated by the stimulation of Boney's colour and pageantry.

If this was the effect on him, who hated the conqueror and all his works, what must it be on those young Frenchmen . . . ?

To Alan, weak from loss of blood and light-headed under the hot sun, it seemed that he had seen nothing but movement and pageantry—yes, and eerie dreams too—ever since last night.

He shut his eyes, and his mind moved back to it.

To a burning sky, and to Lieutenant Hans Schneider's black-daubed face (incredulous, stricken) when Schneider unexpectedly collapsed off his horse just as Alan flung a sabre-cut at his head and Schneider parried it. One cut and parry; that was all.

The torches of pursuit, in the hands of soldiers, were clear along the road behind and in front when Alan had galloped down that side road to the Inn of the Sleeping Cat beside the sea.

Himself giddy and bleeding like a stuck pig, he had knocked at the door of the low, sinister-looking building, and given the arranged password to the man who opened it.

He could not understand who stayed at the Inn, or even who drank there. He could see nobody in the place except the so-called Uncle Pierre, a massive, sombre man with a pock-marked face and a broken nose, and the so-called Aunt Angèle, who was also massive but very handsome in her own none-too-clean way.

In the low parlour, while the sea crashed against beach and jetty outside, and a dim light glimmered from a floating wick in a bowl of fish-oil, he still bled all over the place until Pierre twisted a tourniquet tightly round his right arm, and Angèle bathed and bandaged the wound while Alan told his story.

There was no ornament in the stuffy room except a big steel engraving of Georges Jacques Danton, already yellowed against the damp wall. It may have been only to Alan's heated and tired imagination that the heavy pock-marked features of Danton, the lion of the French Revolution, dead and guillotined these eleven years, came to look exactly like the features of the middle-aged Pierre bending over him

Alan's first attempt, once his reeling head steadied, was to go back again to the Park of Statues for Madeleine.

" No," said the heavy-voiced Pierre.

" But I can't leave her there! "

The fish-oil lamp glimmered weirdly; the sea charged the beach as an army might have charged it; the handsome if overblown Angèle brought him steaming broth, which Alan drank gratefully.

" Look out of the window," said Pierre. " The roads and even the fields are full of soldiers with torches. You would not get twenty metres alive. Your government pay me well to take these risks, and there are other reasons—" he glanced at the face in the steel engraving—" but no man sells his neck. If you will look at those people searching for you—"

" I know that! They had already found Schneider when I left. But—"

" This Schneider, was he badly wounded? "

" I couldn't tell, but I don't think so."

"Then, when he recovers, he will tell them who you really are and what you look like?"

"No, he will not," said Alan with some violence.

The pock-marked face, with its broken nose and hairy nostrils, loomed over him like a goblin. "You seem very sure," said the heavy voice. "Why?"

"It is a question of a personal grudge; he cherishes it like a maniac. Schneider will not breathe a word to anyone until he is sure he can't find me and kill me himself."

"Well, it may be so. He is not a man to trifle with; one of those Cuirassiers in the troop escorting Talleyrand told my friend Legrand at Pont-de-Briques how he killed their leader with a single cut through the neck. However, it may be so."

"I will take my oath on it."

"As for your young woman," said Pierre, "she is safe enough where she is at the moment. In Captain Cut-throat they are looking"—a strange contortion twisted his features as he peered at Danton's picture—"for someone who has been hereabouts for a long time; not for someone who arrived at the Park of Statues tonight. Twenty persons, you say, saw you ride away from there not long ago?"

"Yes."

"Then the soldiers will not search there. But, in five minutes, they *will* search here. We must get you into the concealed cellar at once."

Momentarily, while the sea thundered outside, Alan wondered in a dull way what the history of this smuggler, Pierre Somebody, had been. For all his appearance he spoke like a man of culture and education.

"I know exactly what you mean to do tomorrow, if you are strong enough. And you must be strong enough! Your eyes are turning up now; can you hear me?"

"Yes. The devil take Boney!"

"Tomorrow morning you shall have a different horse; that grey one in the stable would be suspected. You must wear the blue-and-buff clothes; the bloodstains are the worst to conceal, but my wife will try to clean and dry them as well as possible, and the rest you must risk. You cannot ride into that camp armed with a sabre, but I'll give you a pistol you can hide under your coat. Even one shot may on occasion be useful. In the meantime, I counsel you, remember your mission and forget this young woman of yours at the Park of Statues."

Middle-aged Angèle, who had been looking at Alan, spoke for the first time. "I shall take a message to her," she said.

"Fool!" said her husband curtly.

"I shall take a message to his woman," said Angèle, "and you shall not stop me. I am well-known here; would anyone suspect *me* on the road? Am I not acquainted with the secret gate in the wall where the Emperor's distinguished guests," and she sneered, "may bring in their little friends of the opera or the ballet unknown

to the sentries at the Park of Statues? *I* shall carry a message—yes!"

Pierre, his hairy hands on his knees, jerked his head towards the window. "Whatever you do," he snapped, "this young man goes at once into the cellar. If you listen, you will hear them coming along the road to find him now."

That night, in a damp cave of a cellar where the sea noises had a hollow boom, Alan at first could not sleep at all. He had a touch of fever; images, pain-and-fever-inspired, thronged incessantly behind his eyelids.

It was no doubt during unconsciousness, from that part of the brain that tells us by instinct what is true or false, that Alan knew he had been wrong in his interpretation of those events at the Field of the Balloons: wrong about the murder of the last sentry, wrong about the last and too-garrulous note left behind at the order of Captain Cut-throat.

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

There was something he should have seen about the motives of Joseph Fouché . . .

Here he was safe enough, even when feet trampled above and musket-butts banged the stone roof above his head. He lay in the dark, wrapped in a thick bedgown belonging to Pierre. His watch was so soaked that at first he feared mud or grit had got into its works; but its ticking seemed still to go on reassuringly when, about two in the morning, lantern-light burnt his eyes and he saw Angèle. Her brown hair was drenched and her wet dress plastered to her.

"I have been there. All is well."

"You saw Madeleine?"

"All is well," insisted Angèle, kneeling beside him and putting her hand on his forehead. "She had been through much, and they let her sleep. We have a carriage here. We have not used it for some time. But tomorrow, when it is safe, it goes to fetch your lady and will bring her to the Sleeping Cat."

"I can't thank you . . ."

"It is nothing. Now kiss me; I am not young, but kiss me—again!—and sleep until I call you. To defeat your enemies but still to spare them: that is good. Now sleep."

He whirled out into darkness with the words, "Captain Cut-throat, Captain Cut-throat, Captain Cut-throat, Captain Cut-throat!" ringing in his head like the sea noises outside. And he did not open his eyes until the lantern-light blinded him once more as Angèle touched his shoulder.

"It is seven o'clock," she whispered, "and a fine morning. Breakfast is waiting; there is hot water if you would bathe; your clothes are not good, but they will do. There is a test before you today. Make haste!"

As he set forth again with a slow but reliable black horse called Gladiator, the strangest and in a way most vaguely disquieting part of the whole three-mile journey, from Pont-de-Briques to

the centre of the Boulogne Camp, was that not a soul asked to see his papers or even stopped and questioned him.

In his breast pocket, with a loaded pistol bulging uncomfortably between coat and waistband, he carried the pass given him by Fouché and signed by General Savary. The map of the camp retrieved from Mercier, after memorizing it, he had destroyed.

The whole place was aswarm with sentries of the Guard. Sentries were everywhere farther on. But, even when he had taken up a position on a slope two hundred yards south of the vast parade-ground, with the camp spread out below him and the waters of the Channel glistening beyond the brown line of the cliff edges straight ahead, there was still no question and no challenge.

The hot blue sky, the accursed breeze blowing steadily seawards —which would only delay the frigate *Medusa* if she appeared this morning—were omens he did not like.

He had no wish to go too close to the parade-ground. This city built on the downs above the Channel, this city of little thatched houses with street signs painted up on boards was divided into streets and avenues; he could shut his eyes and see the map.

Just on his left, as he sat in the saddle on Gladiator's back, the avenue de la Fédération curved round and should eventually come out in an open space beside the Emperor's pavilion. He could see the Emperor's pavilion, about a quarter of a mile ahead. On one side of it rose a gigantic flagstaff for signals to the ships, with no flags on it now; at the other side of the pavilion was a battery of monster mortars—sweet 'uns, the gunners called them—which had their counterparts at Ambleteuse and, according to British information, could carry shells nearly five miles out to sea.

When the proper time came, he could ride along the avenue de la Fédération to take up his position at the cliff edge near the pavilion.

That is, if nothing happened.

Meanwhile, this lack of interest in a wandering and hatless civilian might only mean that they were more lax here than they would have been in an English camp. Civilians did often visit the Boulogne arsenal, of course. Or it might mean that all interest had become centred on the review about to begin in splendour on the pennon-decorated Field of Mars.

Craning round, Alan could see in the distance a troop of Horse Grenadiers trotting along some unknown street. On the battery of monster guns above the harbour he could see artillerymen, as small as blue-clad ants, lounging as they smoked their pipes and looked back at the parade-ground.

But these were exceptions.

Everywhere about him it was hot and quiet and empty. The avenue de la Fédération, which, according to the notes on Fouché's map, quartered the Emperor's veterans of the Imperial Guard, was as deserted as a street in the ruins of Rome.

There was nothing wrong here: those veterans of the Guard would be taking part in the parade. They would be . . .

Crash! went the shattering bang of the cymbals, on the first bar of the great marching song; the pennons streamed out their gold letters; the blue regiments were statues beneath gathering and growing shouts; and the unsteady Alan, despite himself, found his blood beating and his imagination going like a drum as the twenty bands moved and wheeled across his vision.

Alan, his head swimming and a throb in his swollen and intensely painful right arm, stood up in the stirrups and blinked to clear his eyesight.

The bands had ceased playing in a sudden dead silence from all onlookers. The bands themselves were wheeling again in a glare of brass, but dissolving so as to clear the open side of the huge, hollow oblong. Then it began.

The drums leapt to life with a low, quick rattle, gradually thickening and deepening. First it was a single shout, bursting out. Next, as shakos and bearskins sprang up to twirl round and round in the air on the points of lifted bayonets, the whole mass was split with yelling mouths in one mighty war-whoop that shook the sky above the downs: " Vive l'Empereur! "

At the same instant, by a concerted signal, twenty bands crashed out together. Into the open side of the oblong cantered a small group of horsemen, all wearing cocked hats, and all but one with gold oak leaves sewn along the seams of their tunics.

The single exception rode just ahead of them, in a much smaller cocked hat and a grey coat. By God, it was Boney himself!

He was riding a white horse: a very tractable one, unlike the horse he rode in pictures, because the Emperor was known to be an indifferent horseman and it would not do to have him fall off. At this distance Alan could not even recognize any of the marshals, except Soult by his curved Oriental sword and Ney by his red hair.

Here, automatically, he raised his eyes towards the sea ahead. What he saw, or thought he saw, he at first refused to believe.

It must be his blurred vision, or sun-dazzle on water; in either event, it could only be some distant image which had deceived him. It could *not* be the English frigate herself: beating to windward slowly, it was true, and yet coming in steadily from the left.

But it was.

Pain wrenched his arm again as his hand flew to the left-hand pocket of his waistcoat, and to the heavy watch with the jewelled fob. His stiff fingers bumped the pistol which was jammed into the left side of the waistband, groping again before they could fix on the watch.

Last night he had hoped, and believed that rain or mud had not got inside the watch-case and made it go wrong . . .

Its hands pointed to ten minutes past nine, the same as the last occasion on which he had looked at it. The watch had stopped. He had no notion what the time was.

But he was a quarter of a mile away from the cliff edge near

the Emperor's pavilion, on a horse whose best speed was an indifferent trot; and the ship was standing in closer at every moment.

Ahead of him, in its dust, the avenue de la Fédération stretched out completely deserted under sun-glare between lines of thatched houses. Riding north along the avenue towards the cliffs, Alan found another question vivid in his mind: what was delaying Boney's artillery in firing at that ship?

As he understood it, *Medusa* had no sooner to show her figure-head than every gun within reach cut loose at once. And yet, not one of the coastal guns had come into action.

Then what . . .?

It was a certain remark made by Victor—Victor, the footman at the Park of Statues; Victor, Joseph Fouché's agent—which returned forcibly to Alan now.

"*Depend on it, my lord, they will deal with the English frigate . . . If they cannot spare ships of the line, at least there are enough Imperial gunboats.*"

Imperial gunboats. That was it.

Ordinarily, of course, no gunboat or even a swarm of them would venture against a heavy frigate: the frigate would blow them out of the water. Yet those gunboats, though small, were very fast and they carried heavy metal: they mounted three twenty-four-pounder guns, as well as two bow-chasers and a stern-chaser. Determinedly used, they could play the devil. Worse still, so far as Alan's mission was concerned, a sea-fight off Boulogne would raise such a fog of gunsmoke that no message from the cliff could be seen.

From somewhere far ahead of Alan, as he fought against time along the avenue de la Fédération, echoed out the unmistakable *boom* of a heavy gun over water, and a cheer which was not among the cheers from the parade-ground. He could not swear it was the boom of a twenty-four-pounder—the frigate mounted only eighteen-pounders—but it was a heavy gun. It did not sound like a shore gun. If he heard any more . . .

What he did hear, from behind him, was a gallop of hoofs in the dust, and the calling of a voice through the hot, silent avenue.

"I have you now, I think," said Lieutenant Hans Schneider.

Flying up at the gallop, between the little houses with their sanded paths and seashells, no longer was Schneider the dark-daubed nightmare he had been under the burning, pink-lit sky. He wore a resplendent uniform, a dress uniform as always, and his chestnut horse was as curried and glossy as though on parade.

But his bony face was pale, he carried his right arm in a sling, and he did not even try to draw the sabre that bumped against the horse's flank. His left hand, lightly carrying the reins, was otherwise empty. What he meant to do, as he touched spurs and came thundering up . . .

"Stand!" yelled Schneider.

Then things happened too fast for the action of Alan's conscious will.

As Schneider raced up and overtook him, sweeping the mare in a curve to avoid Alan and get ahead of him, Alan saw the man's left hand drop the reins and dart across to his right side.

Out from the right-hand saddle holster Schneider brought up his long flintlock pistol. Catching the reins again deftly in the same hand, he wheeled round his horse in a cloud of brownish-white dust. Schneider came face to face with Alan, some twenty feet ahead, as his reins dropped again and he lifted the pistol in his left hand.

Alan's stiff fingers fumbled, but brought his own pistol wrenching out of the waistband just in time. Both weapons whipped up together, their barrels gleaming, some twenty feet apart. Alan, covering his enemy's heart at a point under the silver-braided blue dolman ahead of him, sat stock-still and pulled the trigger.

The lock snapped—and the pistol missed fire with a harmless *clack* and a sputter of powder.

That was all.

Then, while Schneider still did not fire, but held his own pistol levelled, with a slight triumphant smile spreading across his bony face, the cheers and the band-music grew even louder from the Field of Mars.

" That was very foolish," rose Schneider's clear, arrogant voice: " Did I say I wished to kill you? " he continued, lifting his blond eyebrows. " I do not wish even to harm you. Not now." The words, starkly incredible as they seemed, made Alan pause with all his muscles tense. " For some time I have been following you, and waving away those who would have challenged you. An escort! Would I have done that, eh, if I meant you harm? "

" If that's true, lower your pistol and stand aside! "

" No," said Schneider, with his increasingly smug complacence. " Not until you make me a promise."

Medusa must be getting closer. Again Alan heard the distant boom of a heavy gun from the sea.

" What promise? "

" Refuge," said Schneider.

" *What?* "

" Refuge. I cannot say too much, even in an empty street. But, if you go to England," said Schneider, " then *I* go to England in safety. Understood? "

Schneider's rush ahead had carried him over to the side of the little street on Alan's right. Schneider sat erect in the saddle, outwardly unperturbed. And yet Alan's scalp crawled at this confirmation of what he realized last night must be true.

" So that's it! " he said, " so that's it! "

" Take care! " said Schneider, his face beginning to change and his trigger-finger tightening.

" You are Captain Cut-throat's killer," said Alan. " But he gave you no order this time. Last night you killed another sentry on

your own account, and deliberately you tried to involve Joseph Fouché. Now you've stopped to wonder what Captain Cut-throat thinks of it; you're frightened to the living soul of you of what he'll do in revenge; and you want refuge in England! "

"Take care, I say! " shouted Schneider. " It was in this street I shot a fool of a guardsman for his insolence to me. You'll get the same if *you* are insolent. Do I have your promise, or not? "

" No, you bastard! " said Alan. " You'll get no refuge in England or anywhere else! "

The report of the gunshot, though it would have gone unheard by anyone else under the renewed cheering and band-music, sounded deafening in Alan's ears.

Instinctively he had tightened his body to meet a bullet at twenty feet; instinctively he had flinched and closed his eyes. But his eyes automatically opened; and he saw that Schneider had not even pulled the trigger.

The hammer of the pistol was still back, reared up like a fang; no smoke came from the glistening muzzle. On Schneider's face, under the high, dark busby, the look of arrogance was sagging into one of rather stupid astonishment.

There was much strength in the man. Even when the pistol dropped out of his hand, jarred off, and exploded in the road so that his horse's legs shivered, he remained steady in the saddle.

Using his good left hand on the saddle-bow, he swung slowly down from the horse at the side of the dusty little street. He took a couple of meaningless steps, a magnificent figure in light-blue-and-silver and red trouser-stripe above the polished boots. But he stumbled against the knee-high wooden fence round one of the little front gardens. He reeled, swung round, and pitched straight over backwards into a trim, bright flower-bed.

Not until then, as Alan himself dismounted and ran over to the garden with its sanded path and seashells, did he see the blood on Schneider's light blue dolman and tunic.

Ever since Monday night, he and Schneider had been seeking each other to settle their differences with sabres. They had exchanged one cut and parry. They would never exchange another; Schneider lay on his back, shot dead through the heart in an apparently empty street, by some musket Alan had not even seen.

No movement stirred in the avenue de la Fédération. A little distance away from Schneider's body, in a sanded path, stood a watering-pot painted bright blue.

Then, as Alan looked down at him, the breeze rolled a noise of distant firing: light and heavy guns rumbling over the sea.

The ship, you fool! the ship!

How Alan coaxed the speed he managed from Gladiator, it is not possible to say. But he measured time less by distance than by the decreasing sound of parade cheers and band-music from behind him, and the increasing sound of jubilant cheers from in front.

The large open space round the Emperor's pavilion was totally deserted except for four sentries of the Marine Guard, oblivious to anything except their duties, pacing inside the head-high palings of the fence.

Alan, pulling up Gladiator, looked round quickly. He had expected to see naval officers at the foot of the giant flagstaff. But the signals had been hoisted; whoever hoisted them had hurried away to Admiral Bruix's smaller pavilion towards the right. Telescopes bristled there; men gesticulated. But nobody glanced at the newcomer.

Alan dismounted and ran to the edge of the cliff, with the wind singing behind him. Above the roar of cheering from the beaches below, he could hear voices from the direction of the admiral's pavilion.

"*Remark it, now! remark how close the little gunboats go!*"

"*It is magnificent, that!*"

"*Magnificent, yes! But why don't the goddams fire?*"

Fully twelve Imperial gunboats, well spaced out behind each other, with the following wind slightly on their port quarter, were swooping down on the frigate and pouring fire at her before veering off and coming round in a slow circle to fire again.

As Alan watched, the leading gunboat let drive with her first bow-chaser, then the second; going round to starboard, she brought to bear one of her big twenty-four pounders. The heavy gun-shock blended with a concussion like the flat smack of an enormous palm against water. *Medusa* took the round-shot full across her forward bulwarks. But not once did she falter, or cease to come in slowly and doggedly against the wind.

That wind had delayed her just long enough. Within half a minute she would be close enough for a man with a telescope on her deck to see Alan's signals from the cliff. If the smoke were not too thick, if the smoke . . .

Whack! and *whack!* went the bow-chasers of another gunboat; then the hollower boom of the twenty-four-pounder. *Medusa*, her crew piped to battle stations but still showing no colours, took all three shots in her hull and steadily came on.

The sun danced through a smoke-haze which blew and lifted over grey-green water. Alan raced along the edge of the cliff until he had his back towards the seaward side of the fence round the pavilion. There, where his blue coat and buff waistcoat would show up most clearly, he could not raise his arms or he would have been a conspicuous target at once. But he lifted the stiff fingers of his right hand as high as he dared.

And it was worth the try, though he could hear a sentry of the Marine Guard pacing inside the fence within a dozen feet of him. He was almost sure he caught the sun-flash of three telescopes aboard *Medusa*, just as she staggered before another blast of fire.

One single letter, now . . . The letter X if Boney would invade Britain, the letter Y if he had abandoned the project.

And the letter Y was the most conspicuous of them all. Right

hand uplifted, three fingers folded under, thumb and little finger up, Alan gave the signal with the right hand, with the left, with the right again.

" *Are they insane, these goddams? Or have they no powder or shot?* "

" *She is holed again, I think she is listing!* "

BONEY IS—

No, thought Alan desperately as his fingers flew; that was not compressed enough for what he had to say. He must do it in three words before the thickening smoke . . .

BONEY COUNTERMARCHING AUSTRIA. BONEY COUNTERMARCHING AUSTRIA. BONEY—

Alan, even as his fingers obeyed him in repeating those letters over and over, found his whole body trembling like that of a man with malaria. He had practised the alphabet so much that the letters formed themselves with automatic motion.

Glancing to his left, he saw the blue-uniformed artillerymen on the battery of monster guns yelling at each other as they pointed towards *Medusa*. Glancing to the right, he saw the wink of brass telescopes also concentrated on the struggling frigate.

Incredible as it seemed, nobody had observed him.

BONEY COUNTERMARCHING AUSTRIA. BONEY—

But had the ship received his message? That was what he could not tell, if he sent it a hundred times.

Then Alan stood rigid, and his hands dropped amid the blowing gunsmoke and the howling voices from shore. *Medusa* was going about on her course.

And signal-flags broke from her; and Alan read the clear news they carried to him over the grey-green water.

MESSAGE RECEIVED.

Then *Medusa* had done it! She had stood in, against every obstacle and every ill star of bad luck, and had won after all.

" *She is on fire!* "

" *I tell you, she is on fire! Look through this glass!* "

No, Alan thought, it was not a bad blaze. She could still get away; she ought to get away; she must with any sense in her head get away.

He could not hope to hear the boatswain's pipe. But even at that distance, across water, he could hear her crew begin to cheer. Her colours climbed and broke out. Above the smoke flew the Cross of St. George. And *Medusa*—listing, crippled, and on fire—wheeled in her tracks to fight.

Many of her guns were out of action, their crews dead or helpless. But, as the ragged crash of her first broadside reverberated over the water, a split second after the blossoming of gunsmoke and gun flashes, the tone and tempo of the yells from shore abruptly altered. Even that ragged broadside caught the gunboats racing in.

The cries from shore became howls of another kind. All the attackers veered off, except two determined gunboats which still charged at her like hounds at a boar. Round swung *Medusa*, to

give them the weight of her other broadside—just as a last wild twenty-four-pounder shot opened her hull at the water-line.

The other broadside smashed out; smoke extinguished everything; one of the gunboats blew up; and presently, as the haze began to lift, they could see the other gunboat as only wreckage. *Medusa*, with the smoke-foam round her jaws, hung there, waiting.

Still she waited in challenge, firing no shot, until the heaving water was empty except for wreckage, and not a sail stirred out against her.

Then, with the wind at her back, she shouldered round painfully and stood out to sea while nearly every coastal gun opened fire after her.

Alan looked round.

On the eight-foot-wide path, between the edge of the cliff and the palings of the pavilion, stood Joseph Fouché. He loomed up, lean and frail, under a high chimney-pot hat with a badly brushed nap; and his snuff-box was in his hand.

A little distance behind him, near the edge of the cliff where the track descended was drawn up an open carriage whose green-and-gold panel on this side bore a flaming letter *N*. Ida de Sainte-Elme, in cloak and bonnet, was climbing down out of the carriage and following the Minister of Police.

Contempt for himself was printed on Fouché's withered face.

" Dull-wit that I am! " he said, and rapped his knuckles against the lid of the snuff-box. " To have had the evidence before me, in the record I read out to your wife on Monday night, and yet never to have suspected the sign-language until Madame de Sainte-Elme told me you would try to signal a ship! Dull-wit that I am! "

" I have been expecting you," said Alan.

Again the Minister of Police struck the lid of the snuff-box.

" That is just as well," he said. " The game is finished, Monsieur Hepburn. Your course is run."

Behind him, Alan heard the steady, inexorable footfalls of a Marine guardsman going past and fading away. The narrow side of the high, grey-painted pavilion itself reared up nearby, and two of its corners, on this side, were enclosed in glass so that the Emperor could look out over the camps or over the sea. The glass corners, he noted with great and detached care, were heavily muffled in curtains.

Ah yes! on this occasion Boney had been staying at Pont-de-Briques; he had not visited the pavilion at all. And Alan's mind, like a fly, buzzed slowly and heavily round this point.

Controlling himself, with the usual bloodless impression he gave and with his face withering and sharpening to a set, sardonic expression, Fouché surveyed Alan from head to foot.

" Then from the beginning," snapped the Minister of Police, " you never intended to find Captain Cut-throat at all! "

" Come, dear sir! " said Alan. " This is no time for rogues like ourselves to fall out. *You* never intended from the beginning

that I should find him. Your game was, and still is, to have me caught by yourself and executed as Captain Cut-throat, to resound in praise of your cleverness and ability as supreme police chief."

Fouché's red-rimmed eyes narrowed.

"You knew that?" he asked softly. "How did you know it?"

"Well, my friend, you have an excellent espionage service. Don't underestimate ours."

Rap went the bony knuckles on the snuff-box. "Be good enough to answer me!" said Fouché.

"For months," replied Alan, "you have been saying a certain thing, not in jest but in sober earnest, to the one person on earth you really trust. If you ever put hands on this unknown X, this spy who had been troubling you and Talleyrand for so long, you said you would employ him somehow in your own service."

There was a curious expression on Fouché's face, but he did not comment.

Alan looked wryly at the smouldering eyes of Ida de Sainte-Elme.

"Long before the question of Captain Cut-throat ever came up," he said, "I had certain instructions. During a happy night of love with a charmer who shall be nameless . . . Oh, what difference does it make now?"

It was Ida, her nostrils distended, who spoke then. "Continue!" she said.

"Well! I was told to leave my dispatch-box unlocked. Then I was told to go away and keep myself out of sight, as though I had taken fright and gone into hiding. When I returned, they told me, I should be arrested and called on to enter your service."

Fouché looked as withered as an idol.

"During the week I was in hiding," Alan continued, "the Captain Cut-throat murders began. From the very first it was rumoured—ask anyone here at Boulogne—that you would be called in to investigate. You heard that. So did our agents. You insist on knowing this?"

"Yes!"

"While I was in hiding," said Alan, "you were already looking for me to arrest me. Our people told me that very possibly, when I went back to have myself arrested, I might be called on for a different role. Originally the game had been only to have one of our men as an agent in the enemy's camp. Now I might find myself in the enemy's camp in a quite literal and far more important sense. And you insist on hearing how they knew I might be sent to find Captain Cut-throat? It was because, to this one person on earth you really trust, you had already confided a beautiful plan."

The Minister of Police did not speak; it almost seemed that he could not.

"The one person he trusts?" cried Ida, with contemptuous amazement. "*This* inhuman vulture trust anybody? To whom did he tell it, then? In whom did he confide? From whom did your own accursed secret agents learn it?"

Alan looked at Fouché. "I would not have told you," he said

quietly, " if you had not guessed before you asked me. Yes. It was your wife, the lady you call Bonne Jeanne."

The Minister of Police did not move or even blink. He stood rigidly, holding the snuff-box. But out from behind the red-rimmed eyes, for a disturbing instant, peered a stricken human being.

" Reassure yourself," Alan said with curt bitterness. " The lady is quite virtuous; and she would never think of telling your secrets to anyone. But she has a passion for gossip with female friends. She did not think this plan of yours was at all important; and, originally, it wasn't. Reassure yourself, then! "

Joseph Fouché looked down at the snuff-box. Carefully, with his long corpse-like fingers, he put away the box in the tail-pocket of his coat.

" Monsieur Hepburn," he said, after a pause, " I thank you."

" Your plan very soon became important, didn't it? " Alan demanded. " I went back to Paris and was arrested on the night of the 20th. The very same night, you received the message you expected from the Emperor; but a far more difficult order than you ever expected. ' Find Captain Cut-throat in seven days.'

" You knew that was virtually impossible. But the Emperor expects to be obeyed; it would go very badly with you if you failed him. It never mattered to you one sou who Captain Cut-throat really was. All you wanted was a scapegoat, somebody who could be proved to everyone's satisfaction to be stabbing sentries as an English agent in the pay of Pitt. And you could produce the victim instantly, as evidence of your great acumen."

Alan was now pouring out words before he could stop himself. " The mouse," he said, " was in your hands. You could let him run a little way, just a little way, before the cat jumped. ' See,' you could then say, ' I suspected all the time this Vicomte de Bergerac was Captain Cut-throat; I gave him the chance to betray himself, so heavily guarded he could never hurt us in the least; and now, behold, he *has* betrayed himself. Kill him; give me the credit! '—Isn't *that* true? "

" Yes," said the Minister of Police calmly.

" The full details," said Alan, " I don't know and never knew."

" No," observed the Minister of Police, pursing his lips. " You have not fathomed them all. I flatter myself," and his eyes opened wide, " they were more effective than you think. Except for an indiscretion of my wife—"

Ida de Sainte-Elme began to laugh. " Your wife! " she said. " The master of destinies, who uses all other people's women to suit his own ends—! "

Now Fouché did move. He spoke softly and even agreeably, but his voice choked off Ida's laughter. " I advise you, dear lady, to have a care."

" But it *is* comical, don't you think? "

" No," said the Minister of Police.

" Alan, *I* hold nothing against you! " Ida said impulsively. She

hesitated, she even softened, now that her enemy was white-faced and defeated. " If there is anything *I* can do—? "

" Yes. If they'll let me see Madeleine before—"

" You want to see *her*, do you? " screamed Ida.

" Madame," said Alan, " why can't we behave as we should behave, instead of acting like children as soon as our pride is touched? Minister of Police, now that I seem to be again in your loving care, where are you taking me? "

" We are going to the Emperor's pavilion," said Fouché imperturbably. " Very shortly you will meet the man you are pleased to call Boney. I have promised the Emperor that this morning, without fail, I shall introduce him to Captain Cut-throat. His Majesty will be surprised, I feel, when he learns who has really been trying to destroy his Grand Army. Nevertheless, I must—"

" I am guilty of espionage," said Alan, " I have never denied that. But I am not Captain Cut-throat. You know I'm not. If you think you are going to show off . . ."

The Minister of Police looked straight at him.

" *How do you know what I am going to do?* " he asked.

Fouché did not shout these words. With his weak throat, he would have been incapable of shouting anything. And yet, as he drew himself up with wide-open eyes and the frozen-blooded expression that could make even Ida de Sainte-Elme shiver, the effect was just as though he had shouted.

This game was not finished. The Minister of Police would still take his pleasure in another ace-up-the-sleeve.

The Minister looked round testily and touched Ida's arm.

" You, dear lady, shall go with us."

" *I?* " exclaimed Ida, evidently astonished, " to the pavilion? "

" Come, dear lady. It will not be the first time that a person of the female persuasion has visited the pavilion in secret. And this sudden maidenly modesty, I feel, sits most strangely on *your* bonnet. Accompany me, if you please! "

He was already impelling her back along the path towards the open space, and the stunned Alan could only follow.

" But the pavilion is closed! " Ida was protesting. " The Emperor is at some review . . ."

" Dear lady, this matter is of such importance that to find Captain Cut-throat and end the threat to his army, the Emperor would leave the side of military glory itself. He has promised to leave the end of the review to his friend, Marshal Berthier. You enjoy conflict, I believe? "

" Conflict? "

" The lust of battle," said Fouché with benevolent tenderness, " is never very far from your eyes. Be of good cheer, then: very shortly, madame, I promise you such a scene of conflict as you are unlikely to view very often. Ah, here we are! "

They had emerged into the open space, and turned right towards the gate in the fence round the pavilion. Just outside the gate ran a long wooden hitching-rail to which was tethered a horse with a

very plain saddle. Inside the gate, talking to a Marine sentry, was an unobtrusive-looking man in fine but sober dark clothes with white wrist-ruffles.

" Sir," he addressed the Minister of Police, with an uneasy eye and a worried forehead, " I have the Emperor's order that you are to be permitted inside, and His Majesty will join you presently. But there is no one in the pavilion to receive you; the curtains have not even been drawn back from the windows."

" My dear Monsieur de Meneval," said Fouché at his most courteous, " that will do admirably! We want as little attention attracted as possible and no crowd round us. Let the curtains stay closed, by all means. There are lights? "

" Yes, yes, I left a candelabrum burning in the foyer. But I am riding out to the parade-ground now," the man addressed as Monsieur de Meneval nodded towards the horse, " and where shall I tell His Majesty he will find you? "

" The council-room will be best suited to the matter, I think."

Fouché turned to Ida and Alan. " Precede me," he invited.

The Marine sentry saluted. As they went up a gravelled path to a door in the long side of the pavilion, Alan had time only to see, beyond the cook-house and the fence, a small ornamental lake on which floated two black swans. Then they were inside, and Fouché had closed the door behind them.

The tall, gaudy foyer, dark except for a branch of five candles burning on a table, smelt heavily stuffy and musty. Picking up the candelabrum, Fouché led the way with echoing footsteps towards a door of a room which, if its curtains were opened, would have faced out on the sea and, from one angle, towards the cliffs of Dover in the distance.

They were in the eagle's eyrie of the Emperor. The large, lofty room, which dwarfed the light of the five candles, was as full of the Emperor's presence as though he had already arrived.

Its walls, papered in silver-grey, had no ornament except a big red-coloured map of the English ports and the French ports on either side of the Channel. But the painted ceiling created a somewhat spectacular effect: against an azure sky, an eagle in clouds of gold-leaf represented the Emperor being directed by his star to hurl a thunderbolt against England.

" Now! " said Joseph Fouché. He went to a large oval table, its top covered in green baize.

" Now! " repeated the Minister of Police, putting down the candelabrum on the table, " now at last I can do what I have promised myself. I can give myself the luxury, for once, of speaking freely and honestly."

Ida was looking more and more uneasily round this room of threat and power.

" But what," she challenged him, " is there to speak freely and honestly about? even if the serpent wishes to do so? "

" The serpent does indeed wish to do so." Fouché, pushing the chair to one side and standing at one end of the green-covered

oval table, looked at Alan. " In much of what you said a while ago, concerning the design to convict you as Captain Cut-throat—"

" Are you telling me I was wrong? "

" Not at all. You were right. But I do not think," said Fouché, rubbing the palms of his hands together with a dry, rustling noise, " you appreciate how complete was the case against you. You are an Englishman, the best choice for the role. Since my own agents had been looking for you without success during the week of August 13th to 19th inclusive, you could have had a perfectly fair trial without being able to prove you were not at Boulogne stabbing sentries.

" As exhibits in the affair, I presented you with one of the English daggers and one of the tattered, bloodstained notes signed *Captain Cut-the-throat*. Those meant nothing, nor did the pass I was obliged to give you. But this was only to conceal something else I gave you."

" If you mean—"

" I mean a complete map of this camp. As a British agent, you would have tried to make use of it. Found in your pocket, it would have damned you past hope. It is probably in your pocket at this minute—"

" That's where you're wrong! " said Alan. " I invented an excuse to produce it so that Mercier could take it away from me. When I got it back, because I had to have it, I destroyed it as soon as I'd memorized it. But what's the good of repeating all this? You've caught your mouse. Why do you keep prolonging the torture? If you'll accept my assurance that Madeleine is innocent, then bring on your guard and execute me before I lose my nerve! "

The Minister of Police raised his red eyebrows.

" And who," he inquired, " who said you were going to be executed at all? " Ida's gasp, as she backed away from the table went unheard by Alan.

" You and your wife "—the bloodless lips were moving with precision—" had intended to take a boat which puts in at the coast tonight. That is so, is it not? "

" Yes, but—"

" You are assisted by Pierre de Lautrec, a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne during the days of the Revolution, once an acquaintance of mine and now the keeper of an inn near Condette. Am I, Joseph Fouché, completely ignorant of what goes on under my very nose? You and your wife, I say, had intended to take that boat tonight. Very well! you shall take the boat as you intended; and whoever attempts to stop you will do so at his cost. I have said it."

Alan's first impression was that exhaustion, and the pain of his wounded arm might have touched his brain or turned his senses. His gaze went up to the eagle and the thunderbolt against the azure ceiling. He looked down again at the withered, malignant face, hung there over the candle-flames with long neck extended,

as though the Minister of Police were condemning him to death instead of . . .

Instead of . . .

" You are giving me my life? " Alan shouted. " You are setting Madeleine free too? "

" Have I not said it? "

" But what's the reason for this generosity? "

" Generosity? " repeated Fouché, with contempt. " Dear sir, if I do this, believe me, I have motives of my own."

" How *can* you do it? Won't the Emperor himself be here at any minute? "

" He will."

" Then how can you explain everything that's happened? Haven't you promised to produce the real Captain Cut-throat? "

" Of course."

" Tonnerre de dieu! " said Ida de Sainte-Elme. As though to get rid of a weight stifling her, she unfastened and took off her elaborate bonnet. Off came the pelisse as well, showing her in a red-and-black dress which seemed to heighten the tawny flush on her cheekbones. Bonnet and pelisse were flung on the table.

" Tonnerre de dieu! " said Ida. " I counted myself equal to most occasions; but you, dear Minister, will remain double-faced and unpredictable until Judgment Day."

" If I let this man go, Madame de Sainte-Elme," said Fouché softly, " have *you* any cause to speak of it afterwards? "

" I—I have nothing against Alan, now that he has so miserably failed in his mission. I have never wanted to see him shot. But what I have to tell the Emperor about that woman, which I shall do as soon as he gets here . . ."

Fouché smiled, showing his bad teeth. " Dear lady," he said, still softly, " you will tell the Emperor nothing about Madame Hepburn. Considering what I know of your past, are you in any position to dictate terms to me? "

" No, perhaps not! And yet Alan is right in one thing! What do you propose to say to the Emperor? You must find explanations for *him*. What can you tell him? "

" The truth," said Fouché, looking at her curiously.

" Truth, truth, truth! "

" You would speak of jesting Pilate? "

" I am more likely to speak of jesting Judas, dear Minister, who is nobody but yourself! Why do you set these people free? What is your motive? "

" Ah yes. My motive." The Minister of Police's tone remained agreeable. His nostrils were pinched as Alan had seen them before. Slowly, very slowly, he reached to the back of his coat and took out the snuff-box, which he weighed in his left hand.

" There is much," he said, " that I consider only a part of life. There is much I can watch with indifference if not positive amusement. There are, however, certain things which annoy one of

even *my* philosophical temper, and which I do not permit at all. I will not have my intelligence mocked. Nor will I have all my best efforts met only with betrayal.

"Various persons, in this affair, have made various blunders. But the greatest blunder of all was made by the so-called Captain Cut-throat. It was very fortunate last night that I was well on my way to Boulogne when I received a semaphore message at Amiens. I was on my way, of course—"

Here the red-rimmed eyes moved to Alan.

"I was on my way, of course," said Fouché, "to expose you as Captain Cut-throat before you could do any great harm. The message I received, from one of my agents in this camp, caused me to continue my journey all night in a state of annoyance which I shall not attempt to describe. Do you begin to understand, Monsieur Hepburn?"

"No!"

"You do not?" asked Fouché, raising his eyebrows. "And yet, last night at the Field of the Balloons, another murder was committed. Let it be so: I am not disturbed at that. But, when he caused this last murder to be committed, Captain Cut-throat was guilty of a truly memorable error. Captain Cut-throat allowed a paid agent to leave a note implicating *me*. And that, dear sir, is not done with impunity."

Ida was frantic. "But in what way," she screamed, "does this affect what you have to tell the Emperor? Why should he care whether Captain Cut-throat tried to implicate you?"

The Minister of Police rapped his knuckles on the snuff-box.

"Because the Emperor himself *is* Captain Cut-throat," he said. "And I am prepared to prove it before the whole Grand Army."

During a long silence, while the candle-flames shone steadily on silver-grey walls in the curtained, airless room, the only person who seemed unmoved was the malignant Joseph Fouché.

"This affair," he went on, taking snuff, "presents a curious problem in ethics. How far is the head of an autocratic state justified in doing technical evil if he really thinks good will come of it? How far may he go in cynically ordering the deaths of a few men for what he believes is to the benefit of his whole people?

"It is true, since he believes himself inspired by his star or his destiny to rule the world, he need not hesitate or blame himself. It is further undeniable, in this case at least, that the Emperor has technical right on his side: he could say with truth that he was justified; and, in fact, was only administering justice.

"Every one of five sentries, those who died between the 13th and the 19th August, was a malcontent and a trouble-maker, a danger to the army, possibly even a member of the Olympian Society. By strict letter of military law, they could have been tried and condemned to death: that was why they were chosen as victims. In any court of all Christendom, if any court existed to try him, His Majesty could arise with truth and passion and prove himself

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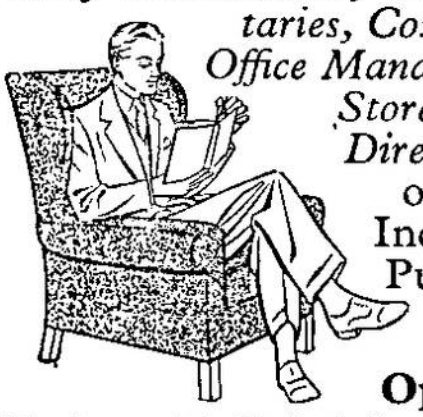

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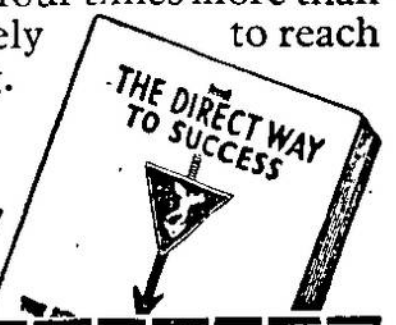

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free of all blood-guilt. Nevertheless, I feel it does not quite solve the problem presented by . . ."

Here Fouché broke off, regarding the others in some impatience.

"Come!" he added, "come, Monsieur Hepburn! Surely you suspected that the Emperor himself was Captain Cut-throat?"

"No, I did not!"

"Tcha," said the Minister of Police, "you disappoint me. Now *I* suspected it almost from the beginning."

"But—"

"I had formed a higher opinion of your intelligence, Monsieur Hepburn. In the Room of Mirrors, indeed, there was one point when you said you knew where to find the assassin; for an instant I thought you might have discovered the whole design, and I feared my face had betrayed me. Then I saw you must suspect only Schneider, the obvious agent, and not the less obvious employer behind him. So I was content to let you imagine you were still outwitting me."

The Minister of Police frowned. "It is true," he conceded, "that in the matter of the sign-language—the deaf-and-dumb alphabet of your Dr. Braidwood—you did outwit me. You very nearly succeeded in that, and I ought to make you pay dearly for it. However! I overlook it because you failed to see the identity of the real Captain Cut-throat . . ."

"But the Emperor," said Alan, "was the one person who had no reason to be Captain Cut-throat!"

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"On the contrary," replied Fouché, "he was the one person who had every reason to be Captain Cut-throat."

"In England," said Alan, "we had good evidence that this revolutionary secret society called the Olympians existed . . ."

"And so it does," said Fouché, sharply rapping the lid of the snuff-box, "as I assured your wife. That was why our gracious Emperor was compelled to invent 'Captain Cut-throat' at a critical time. Would you care to hear the points you seem to have missed?"

"Do you realize," said Ida, striking her fist on the green-covered table, "that the Emperor himself will enter by that door at any moment now?"

"And how else should he enter, dear lady?"

"You propose to tell him all this?"

Fouché bared his bad teeth. "It will please me much to do so," he answered. "You must forgive me if, a while ago in the hearing of a Marine Guard sentry behind the pavilion fence, I was obliged to deceive both of you about the identity of Captain Cut-throat. However! I promised you a scene of conflict; and, believe me, you shall have one."

"You can't do it!" Ida cried, "you mustn't! you daren't!"

"Indeed, dear lady? And what is it that I, Joseph Fouché, dare not do?" He looked at her steadily, lifting the red eyebrows as he again opened the lid of the snuff-box, and his mouth twisted. The diamond letter *N* glittered against his grubby shirt-front. Then, controlling himself, he glanced at Alan.

"I do not think, dear sir," he went on in a conversational tone, "you quite understand the character of His Most Gracious Majesty. In his own way, I suppose we must admit, he is a great man. He is not even, in his heart, what the world would call a bad man. But he is guided by his star, by his Corsican impulses. He does things which are worse than crimes; they are blunders.

"The Emperor, here at Boulogne and obsessed with his plan for invading England, found himself opposed by strong elements of republicanism among his marshals and generals. They were not murderers, it is true; but they were men of dangerous influence. Marshal Augereau, who nine years ago saved His Majesty's reputation when the Emperor's courage failed him before the battle of Castiglione; General Oudinot, who should have been made a marshal but for some reason has been overlooked—I spare you the whole list.

"Nevertheless, as I pointed out to Madame Hepburn, this agitation against the Empire reached its height over a fortnight ago now—well before the middle of August. Shall I tell you why, when the full evidence came into my hands on August 21st, I *knew* Captain Cut-throat could be nobody but the Emperor?"

"Yes!" said Alan.

"No!" said Ida. "Listen!" she added, wringing her hands, "don't you hear horses approaching this pavilion now?"

"You hear only the wind, madame. It will be ten minutes at

least before His Majesty can . . ." With great nicety Fouché closed the lid of the snuff-box and addressed Alan.

"Two things, from the beginning," he pursued, "seemed to me completely incredible. Thus. Five murders had been committed in seven nights; three daggers and five scraps of paper, signed as by 'Captain Cut-the-throat,' had been left behind as very clumsy evidence—apparently it did not deceive you, so I need not repeat it—that the murderer must be an Englishman. The Emperor, presumably with no time to trouble about this, turned it all over to me.

"Now, there is one habit of His Majesty as notorious as his habit of wearing a cocked hat. It is this: he cannot keep his own hands off anything. He must see all, know all, direct all, from the placing of the guns in a battery to the kind of pictures that are painted on a corridor wall at the Park of Statues." Once more the Minister of Police's anger simmered, as his face hung above the candle-flames in the curtained and airless room.

"Yet I was asked to believe," he said, "that for a whole week, while sentries were being killed and notes and daggers were accumulating, the Emperor never once looked at the daggers or applied his own acumen to the notes. Never once! I was asked to believe he left all this to the faithful but not-very-competent Savary; and, at the end of the week when the most fantastic 'ghost murder' had taken place, he then turned it all over to me without further concern.

"Tcha!" said Fouché, "am I a babe in arms to be deceived by this? One other thing I was also asked to believe. Somebody—and none could tell where or how the rumour began—had started one of those camp rumours which can spread like fire. This rumour *said* that Captain Cut-throat's activities might incite mutiny against the Emperor.

"Now, why should the acts of Captain Cut-throat in stabbing the Emperor's soldiers turn those men against the Emperor himself? in the name of logic, why? Was it not more likely to bind them closer to him in loyalty against a common enemy, as in fact it did? This rumour of mutiny because of Captain Cut-throat's murders was all a sham, and it took no subtle intellect to see why.

"The Emperor, I repeat, was being plagued by republican elements; and also, for some reason I could not and cannot fathom, was delaying his invasion of England for so long that it was rousing great impatience. Some measure had to be taken at once. Now His Majesty's invariable stratagem, when he is in difficulties, is to distract people's attention: to create a diversion, and give them something else to talk and think about. That is how he wins victories in the field, and—"

Here Fouché broke off sharply. "Did you speak, Monsieur Hepburn?"

"No!" said Alan, "that is, not exactly. Boney's Corsican blood was up, I take it? And he devised as theatrical a series of events as his coronation or his reviews, with Schneider as his agent

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and reflector-lamps as stage properties for his most spectacular effect? Or had you seen the secret of the reflector-lamps?"

"What?" snarled the Minister of Police, "do you take me for a babe in arms? Yes, I did.

"Nobody in the Grand Army," continued Fouché, "could talk of anything but Captain Cut-throat. In their thirst to have the blood of this assassin, they had all but forgotten their wish to plunder London, and to ask why they were still kept inactive. Furthermore, in their concern about a sham mutiny, they were not likely to be lured into a real mutiny.

"All this was characteristic of His Majesty; it could have been inspired by nobody else.

"Nevertheless, the errors made by the Emperor were also characteristic. *He*, or so he believed, could not reveal the meaning of the sham evidence he had created himself. *He* could not show that Captain Cut-throat was a devilish Englishman. He must remain aloof, a god on Olympus. Someone else must do the menial work of discovering it. I was the obvious choice for it—and mark this! I did not object!" *Rap* went the Minister of Police's knuckles on the snuff-box for emphasis. His long neck thrust out snakelike until the candle-flames stung him, and he drew back.

"Whether he expected me to be deceived by his scheme, I cannot say. Perhaps he did. He knew at least I would read the evidence as he wanted it read, and that I would play his game. He was right. I was willing to serve him, and serve him well, because it suited my interest to do so.

"Early on the morning of August 22nd I dispatched a courier from Paris to Boulogne, with a long report telling him my evidence for believing Captain Cut-throat was an English agent. The courier with my report arrived at Boulogne at ten o'clock that night. Yet the Emperor could not restrain that impatience of his. He knew by semaphore message that a courier was on the way.

"But at eight o'clock, two hours before anyone could have known what was in my report, he issued a public proclamation that the assassin had been proved to be a disguised Englishman and offered a hundred gold napoleons for the villain's capture."

"You are not going to expose this publicly?" Alan demanded. "You can't tell the Grand Army that the man they worship has been having them stabbed in the back to suit his higher purposes?"

The Minister of Police looked him full in the eyes and smiled a wicked smile. "Perhaps not," he answered. "But at least I am going to threaten it, and see what the Emperor says. It is time this strutting Corsican had a lesson. Believe me, dear sir, I am acquainted with so many secrets of his—in documentary evidence which can be opened should misfortune befall me—that he will not have *me* arrested or shot.

"I would have served the Emperor well so long as he served me well. He does not like me; that is of no consequence. Nevertheless, when through some whim or caprice of his southern blood

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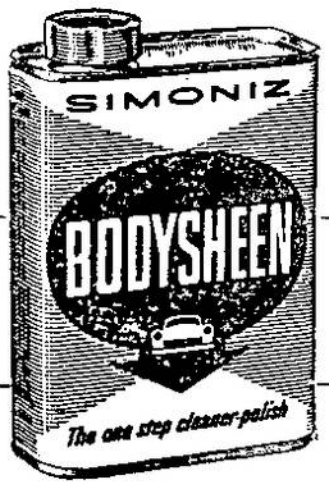

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he chooses to involve *me* in his ridiculous stage effects, and have his agent Schneider leave a note accusing me of complicity in murder, my well-known loyalty suffers a change."

"But he didn't—" Alan began. He checked himself just in time. And the whole hazard unrolled before him in a flash. He and Madeleine were not saved: they were lost. Unless . . .

Fouché's offer to free them, though quite genuine, had been inspired by spite against the Emperor when the Minister of Police's own pride was hurt.

Schneider, Alan was willing to swear, had never been told by the Emperor to kill that sentry last night or to leave a message accusing Fouché of complicity. Very shortly Boney himself would come storming in and say so. What was worse, as soon as the Minister of Police recovered from his wrath—and that could not take long—then Fouché must very quickly guess this fact for himself. His offer would be withdrawn. The boat to England was a mirage; Alan and Madeleine were done for. Unless . . .

There was one more move to be made in this battle of wits against the formidable Minister of Police: the last, the trickiest of all. If it succeeded, he and Madeleine would still go free. If it failed . . .

"Minister," Alan said in a voice which sounded strange and hoarse even to himself, "there is a reason why you must not tell the Emperor *anything* when he arrives."

"Tcha!" said the Minister of Police.

"There is a reason!" Alan insisted. "Merely as a courtesy to an enemy you have defeated, will you hear it?

"Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that you decided not to tell the Emperor anything. If you made that decision, *could* this whole affair be kept a close secret?"

Fouché was looking at him curiously. "In what way?"

"Well, Ida and I, lord knows, would be silent. Captain Mercier would be silent, so as not to imperil his career. But I meant silence as to everything. What about Victor?"

"If you refer," Fouché said contemptuously, "to the footman at the Park of Statues, he is a relative of my wife's, and he knows more of my affairs than I like. However, I could guarantee his silence if it were necessary. But, since I see no reason why I should not administer a lesson to the Emperor—What, precisely, have you to say to me?"

Alan swallowed the lump in his throat. "It concerns Lieutenant Schneider," he answered.

"*That* murderous lout? I requested the Emperor to send me his best swordsman. And what must he do, to check on me, but send me the fool he was using as Captain Cut-throat's agent? You saw, I hope, that Schneider must be under the protection of some authority far higher even than Marshal Soult? Otherwise he could hardly have attacked whom he liked and even killed whom he killed without punishment or so much as a reprimand. Yes, he was under august protection. But what of Schneider?"

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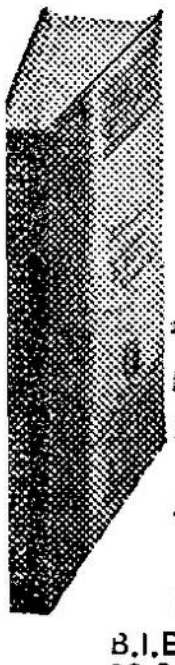

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" Schneider is dead," said Alan. For a second or two, before the stark fact of death, silence held the airless council room in the eagle's eyrie above the Channel.

" Dead? " echoed Fouché.

" I was there when he died. Somebody, whom I never saw, shot him down with a musket in the avenue de la Fédération."

" The avenue de la Fédération? " Fouché's eyes narrowed. " I hear he tried to kill but did not manage to kill a guardsman named Jules Dupont who was working in his garden in that same street. Immediately afterwards, Dupont's brother ran out and tried to kill Schneider with a musket. He did not succeed; but I dare say he has succeeded now." Fouché shrugged his shoulders. " My dear sir, if you are afraid Schneider has told the Emperor *you* are a British spy, and that *you* are given away, be reassured. Nobody has had time to see the Emperor today—"

" I was fairly sure of that. But it was not what I wanted to tell you in persuading you we must all be silent."

" If you have anything that can persuade him," burst out Ida, " for God's sake say it! I *know* I can hear horses now! "

It was true. A clatter of hoofbeats, many horses, drew closer to the pavilion.

" Very well! " said Alan. " You are misjudging the Emperor. He never told Schneider to implicate you in this affair. Schneider did that on his own."

The Minister of Police stood motionless, corpse-like thumb and forefinger poised over the snuff-box. His eyes widened, and then narrowed. " You humiliated Schneider in the Room of Mirrors; you threatened to have him reduced to the ranks. He could not openly attack you, so on his own initiative he killed that sentry and left the note to implicate you. This morning he realized what he had done, and what the Emperor would do to him. Only that would have frightened the man as much as it did! "

The clatter of hoofbeats had come nearer and drawn up before the pavilion. Sweat was running into Alan's eyes.

" As for the Emperor," he continued, " he has the very highest respect for your ability, whether he likes you or not. Shall I prove that? Let me ask you a question, Monsieur Fouché. You are very fond of your wife and children? "

" Take care, sir! " said the Minister of Police, stiffening in all his joints. " You have been most courteous with regard to Bonne Jeanne. But if now you dare to make any—"

" And *she*, I imagine, will enjoy being a duchess? "

Again, while you might have counted five or six, Fouché did not speak. He began to do so, but he kept silent as a kind of lean question-mark in himself.

" You yourself," said Alan, " though you care nothing or profess to care nothing for such gauds, will enjoy seeing your eldest son a peer if the Empire survives? "

" And precisely what—" Fouché was crying out, when Alan cut him off.

"Minister, you do not know everything! The Emperor means to raise you to the peerage with the title of Duc d'Otrante. Look at me! You know men; you will know whether or not I am telling the truth. I say this *is* true; and you must be willing to risk your judgment that it is."

Now it was Alan's turn to stare at Fouché over the candle-flames.

"If you administer a lesson to the Emperor, you will soothe your pride and vanity. He can't shoot or imprison you. But, if you tell him you know he is Captain Cut-throat—if you provoke him to the wildest burst of rage he will ever show in all his life—then your Bonne Jeanne will never find her name in the peerage and neither will any of your children."

Quick footsteps crunched on the gravel of the path leading to the pavilion's front door. The steps halted, while a voice gave instructions. In the council room they could not hear what was said; it was something to the effect that the man who spoke would go alone into the pavilion. But it was the quick, harsh, impatient voice of the Emperor.

Most of all, as the thick air pressed against him, Alan was conscious of Ida's startled face turned towards him.

"Alan!" she cried. "You have signed your own death-warrant!"

"No!" said Alan—who was again riding straight towards his enemies in the hope of escaping them.

"Your own death-warrant!" insisted Ida. "Look at our Minister of Police! He has no generosity; he said it himself. You are as good as dead from now on. He will never let you get away to England and tell everybody this story about Captain Cut-throat!"

Joseph Fouché's red-rimmed eyes seemed for a moment remote and far away, fixed on other places and other persons.

"Duchesse d'Otrante," he murmured, "Duchesse d'Otrante!"

Then, carefully replacing his snuff-box in the tail-pocket of his coat, he straightened up and became his cold, formal, bloodless self. "Monsieur Hepburn," he said, "it is not often, in this game of ours, that I meet an enemy who treats me with any degree of fairness or honour. But it cannot alter matters in the least."

"You see?" cried Ida.

"It is true," the icy voice continued, "that in my justifiable wrath against the Emperor I was anxious only for his victim, yourself, to escape him. That has changed. There is much in what Madame de Sainte-Elme says: you cannot be permitted to go away knowing this story. The Emperor still believes you to be the Vicomte de Bergerac, my investigator. I think I shall enlighten him at once . . ."

"And I," said Alan, "don't think you will."

"No, Monsieur Hepburn?"

"In the first place," said Alan, "I can never tell this story in England because nobody in authority would believe me. You and Ida and I know Boney played this trick for logical reasons to gain his ends; it was even his own idea of justice; but the Government

of His Britannic Majesty would only say it was beneath the dignity of any ruler. Unless you appreciate the nature of the British, you'll never know how true that is!

" In the second place, if you arrest me, the Emperor hears this whole story at once. He's always glad to see a condemned prisoner. He'll have me shot very quickly, yes; but you'll tumble from your high place and you will never climb back again."

Fouché stood rigid.

" Since he *is* Captain Cut-throat," said Alan, " and since he doesn't mean to invade England now—no, don't look surprised—he will be only too gratified if you say Captain Cut-throat has been too clever for us, and it would be useless to investigate further. Tell him that, here and now, and the whole affair is kept silent. Tell him anything else, Minister, and I . . ."

" Sir," said Fouché, " are you threatening me? "

" Yes! " said Alan, " I am threatening you, as you have threatened so many others. There it is, Minister; and the choice is yours."

They faced each other across the table, their glances locked.

Outside the pavilion, the short, quick footsteps strode up to the front door. The outer door opened and closed with a hollow bang and slam which went vibrating through the council room itself. A voice, harsh as a crow's, called impatiently in the foyer for somebody to fetch lights.

Still Fouché and Alan stared at each other, both of them trembling. Ida de Sainte-Elme, with a little moan, sat down in the one chair and put her head in her hands.

Then, not troubling further about lights, the impatient footsteps strode across the foyer. The door of the council room was flung open. Ida sprang up from her chair and swept a deep curtsey in the direction of the doorway.

Joseph Fouché also turned round, very slowly.

" Sire! " he said.

Then, once again, his tone became cold and poised and emotionless. " I take the liberty, Sire," he continued, " of presenting Madame Ida de Sainte-Elme, a great admirer of yours; and the Vicomte de Bergerac, who has been assisting me in my investigation.

" It is with sorrow, Sire, that I must report our complete failure to find this mysterious Englishman. I can only state my regret at my failure; and express the hope that at some future day, not too far distant, I may serve your Majesty as your Majesty ought to be served."

And so, with the stateliness of an old-time courtier, the Minister of Police bowed very gravely to the man in the doorway.

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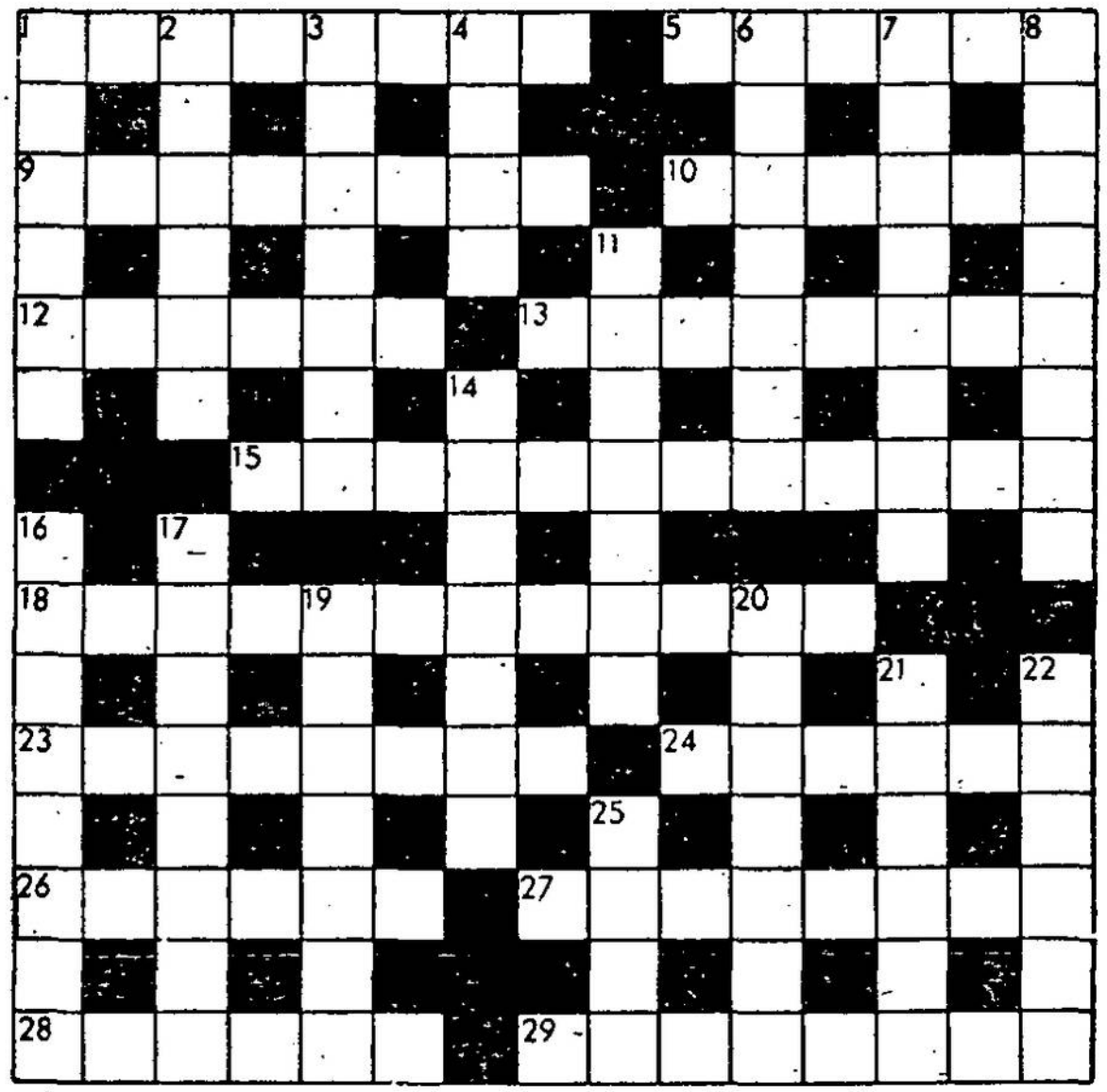

CLUES

Across

1 Precisely, at short intervals (8).

5 Military ones, however, are not untidy (6).

9 Poems that give a curve to angular letters (8).

10 These Florentines were famous—but not as doctors (6).

12 Available, and the opposite of casual (2, 4).

13 Carlyle's incorruptible colour (8).

15 Yews shade Dan at this time of year (3, 9).

18 Giving a *Go* signal on the golf course? (7-5).

23 Cede part to have the floor covered (8).

24 O Sam, I'm a sweet flower (6).

26 " Windy suspiration of forced ——— " (Shakespeare) (6).

27 If she wears the trousers, she's the better horse (4, 4).

28 Unwary on the airfield (6).

29 Susy makes a pact feline (5-3).

Down

1 This colour might explode (6).

2 O nothing (6).

3 News, brought by sea, no doubt (7).

4 Naturally this Elizabethan writer had a flowery style (4).

6 Preen, for example, to ornament the dinner-table (7).

7 I spend a little saint for the salaries (8).

8 Whirling woods, it seems (8).

11 Affectionate offers (7).

14 The sort of coat to wear when boasting (7).

16 Where interplanetary pilots gather for a drink (5-3).

17 The fish is more than a medical man (8).

19 I tear in, but it's laziness, really (7).

20 Yes, old Ireland produces some Furies! (7).

21 Decorative laws (6).

22 Such leather is obvious (6).

25 You begin and end this Hindustani dialect (4).

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Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.